'This book is so crucial in helping people to achieve success in life. Read it, digest it and do what it says!'

Sir Clive Woodward OBE, Elite Performance Director, British Olympic Association (and coach of the 2003 Rugby World Cup Winning England team)



Self-Confidence

The Remarkable Truth of Why a Small Change Can Make a Big Difference



Paul McGee

bestselling author of SUMO (Shut Up, Move On)



Here's what others have to say about *Self-Confidence*:

"Compelling. Candid. Controversial. You have to read it!"

Steve McDermott – Former European Business Speaker of the Year and bestselling author

"You will love this book. Paul McGee is an incredibly intuitive and inspiring presenter and writer. This book will go a long way in helping you regain and rebuild your confidence so that you can reach your full potential for your life"

Rosemary Conley CBE. Diet and Fitness Guru

"From improving your love life, to boosting your job prospects, confidence can unlock the doors to a brighter future. This brilliant book, packed with honesty, humour and hope, provides the keys."

Laine Ferguson Retail Director of The Body Shop

"Packed with practical ideas and insights to build your confidence from the boardroom to the bedroom – and most things in between. You'll wish you'd read this book years ago."

Philip Hesketh. Award winning, international speaker and best selling author

And what they say about Paul McGee, The *SUMO* Guy:

"Your input made an incredible difference. The average score of how well people felt able to cope with change, moved from 71% to 94%; a great move, especially starting from a reasonable base. Your SUMO ideas continue to be frequently used."

Marks & Spencer

"May I on behalf of everyone at Manchester United who attended your session, thank you for a great presentation. The feedback has been excellent and all very positive and I know the ideas within your S.U.M.O. message are greatly appreciated."

Kenneth Merrett, Manchester United F.C.

"In our twenty years of running conferences, Paul McGee is the only speaker we have ever invited back. That above all, explains the benefit we feel we have gained from hearing Paul's SUMO philosophy"

Doug Perkins & Dame Mary Perkins CBE,
Founders of SpecSavers

"Paul you're not a motivational or inspirational speaker I actually think you're a life changing speaker. You give people the tools to change their lives."

Nigel Risner, Television Presenter and Speaker

"Dear Paul, Just wanted you to know that I found your SUMO book both stimulating and instructive. The world of business moves on at such a pace that I believe the SUMO ethos is an essential part of the buiness person's DNA."

Lord Digby Jones

"Every organisation these days needs to be looking for value for money ... we made an investment in over 2,500 of our staff attending a SUMO seminar with Paul McGee. Staff were given insights and ideas that could help them be more effective at work, deal more positively with the challenge of change, and build better relationships with both the public and colleagues. The overwhelming feedback has been that the sessions were inspiring, thought provoking, humorous but above all practical in helping my staff make a positive difference. I would have no hesitation in recommending Paul McGee and his SUMO philosophy to any organisation."

Julie Spence, Chief Constable, Cambridgeshire Police

Other books by Paul McGee, The SUMO Guy:

S.U.M.O. (Shut Up, Move On®): The Straight Talking Guide to Creating and Enjoying a Brilliant Life

S.U.M.O. Your Relationships: How to Handle not Strangle the People You Live and Work With.

Both published by Capstone Publishing

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Self-Confidence

About the Author



Paul McGee is one of Europe's leading motivational speakers and coaches, where he combines practical strategies with both inspiration and realism. He has spoken in 31 countries to date and is the author of seven books. The proud creator of SUMO (Shut Up, Move On), his simple yet profound messages have spread across the globe both in public and private sector organisations. More recently his ideas have been developed for young people under the banner of SUMO4Schools.

Building on his academic background in behavioural and social psychology, Paul is also a trained counsellor, a performance coach and a Fellow of the Institute of Sales and Marketing Management. His aim is simple – "I want to help people achieve better results in life and have more fun in the process." For more information visit www.TheSumoGuy.com

Self-Confidence

The Remarkable Truth of Why a Small Change Can Make a Big Difference

Paul McGee

Illustrations by Fiona Griffiths



CAPSTONE

This edition first published 2010
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Registered office
Capstone Publishing Ltd. (A Wiley Company), The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
McGee, Paul, 1964–
Self-confidence / Paul McGee.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-906465-82-7 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Self-confidence.
2. Self-actualization (Psychology) 3. Success–Religious aspects. I. Title.
BF575.S39M36 2010
158.1–dc22
2009041782

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
Set in 11/14 Baskerville Classico by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited
Printed by TJ International

To Matt and Ruth

“Chickahelameni”

With love

From

Your Mad Dad

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Introduction

"It's all about confidence."
Eric Cantona

Cast your mind back to when you were growing up.

Do you remember getting injections from the doctor or school nurse when you were a kid?

Well, imagine if one of those jabs was to make you immune to the negative impact of rejection, failure and a lack of self-belief.

In other words, you were given an injection of confidence.

What would your life be like if you'd always felt confident?

What would it be like if you could get your confidence booster jab every five years?

What would you do? Where would you go? What would you attempt?

It's an interesting thought.

Agree?

For a start, you'd certainly have no need for this book.

Life could be so much more simple and straightforward.

But it's not.

Life is complex.

And your confidence can be fragile.

It can take years to grow and develop

and yet

one single event can crush it.

So why is confidence so crucial to you and your success and fulfilment in life?

What or who determines your level of confidence?

What happens when your confidence has been crushed?

Can it be rebuilt?

And if so, how?

How can you call on your confidence when you want to be at your best?

That's what this book is about.

In many ways, it's about creating a few more Kevins.

Let me explain.

I was wrapping up a two-day workshop for a group of redundant coal miners on "How to get that job". The event had gone well.

"So what's been the main benefit of the course?" I asked the 12 or so men gathered in the room. I was met with the usual replies that I'd heard countless times before.

"I feel a lot more positive about the future."

"I know how to sell myself more."

"I'll be better prepared for interviews."

Then it came to Kevin's turn.

"If you'd been my teacher at school, Paul, I could have been an astronaut."

I hadn't expected that answer.

Kevin went on. "Since I've been a kid my life has been mapped out for me. My Dad worked in a mine and it was just expected that I would follow.

"I feel this course has given me a lot more belief in myself. I just wish I'd been on it 20 years ago. Who knows where I might be today if I had?"

I've never forgotten Kevin's words.

They're a reminder of how self-belief, or the lack of it, can influence the rest of our lives. I don't want a lack of confidence to cause me to look back on my life and reflect: "I wish I had."

I want to be the kind of person who says: "I'm glad I did."

I want to be a player, not a spectator.

What about you?

Getting More from Your Read

Let me explain my approach to writing this book. I've divided it into two sections.

Section One focuses on gaining more of an understanding about confidence. I explore why it's so fundamentally important to every aspect of our lives. I also expose some of the myths around confidence and uncover some of the

half-baked ideas on the subject that actually do more harm than good. I end this first section by examining how our past affects who we are today and how we think and feel about ourselves.

Section Two focuses entirely on practical ways and ideas to help boost, build and develop your confidence. Whether you're struggling with self-doubt, been made redundant, recovering from a broken relationship or about to go on a date, there are dozens of practical and ready-to-apply tips and ideas to help you move on to fulfill your potential.

Style: I've deliberately written this book so that it's easy on the eye. I find long paragraphs and large blocks of text daunting, so I hope I've made it easier for you to absorb and retain the information.



Pit Stops: You will also notice sections called Pit Stops. These are vital to your ability to get the most from this book.

After all, what's your goal here? To finish reading a book or to grow and develop your confidence?

If it's the latter – which I sincerely hope it is – then you will find the Pit Stops invaluable.

You see, I don't simply want you to read this book. I want you to engage with it. That means taking time out to reflect on and answer the Pit Stop questions.

You'll gain so much more from this book when you do. Promise.



Personal Stuff: In order to add colour and context to the ideas I explore, I've also included sections called "Personal Stuff". These are examples of situations that I and others have experienced and that help reinforce and illustrate points in the book. Stories are a great way to engage in the learning process, and I hope that by providing a window into my world you will find things that you can relate to and identify with.

If the Personal Stuff doesn't tick your box that's fine. I believe they'll provide a richer experience for you, but they aren't essential to the text. You will still discover a load of tools to equip and enable yourself and others to grow in self-belief and overcome self-doubt if you decide simply to skip through the stories. But I hope you don't.

Finally, I'm aware that this book will probably find a home within the self-help genre. Some of those books are a little too sugar coated for my taste, and perhaps for yours as well. Therefore you'll find my approach very down to earth, practical and, above all, realistic.

And please be aware that I'm not here to be nice. I'm here to be helpful.

So be prepared to be challenged as well as equipped to deal with the roller-coaster experience of life. My aim is to

provide you with the ideas and inspiration to do so while hopefully raising the occasional smile along the way.

Finally, I really do believe that Eric Cantona was on to something when he said: "It's all about confidence." So wherever you are on your journey at the moment, I genuinely hope that this book provides you with the confidence to make a difference.

Enjoy.

Paul McGee – The SUMO Guy.



SECTION ONE

The Stuff You Need to Know

1 Why Self-Confidence Is the X-Factor for Life



You're about to discover

The long-term impact confidence can have on your life.

Why a small change can make a big difference.

Why everyone benefits from an increase in self-confidence.

The real upsides of increasing your self-confidence.

What's the Big Deal about Confidence?

If you were to meet the film actor Tom Cruise, there are probably several things you would notice about him:

His smile.

His eyes.

And probably his height.

He's 5 feet 7 inches (or 170 cm). Some people regard that as being a little on the small side. In some cultures Tom's height would make him below average in height for a man.

Now imagine this. What if Tom Cruise increased his height by 10 percent? Not a huge amount is it?

So what's the outcome?

Well, suddenly Tom goes from being 5 foot 7 inches to being over 6 feet 1 inch (185 cm). He goes from below average height to above average height. He goes from being seen as small to being seen as tall.

And how much did he increase his height by?

10 percent. That's all.

A small change can make a big difference.

The bad news for Tom is that although he can try and appear to be taller than he actually is, the truth is there's not really a lot he can do about his height.

But as you may have gathered, this isn't a book about how tall you are, it's about increasing your self-confidence. And whereas there's not much you can do about your height, there's plenty you can do to increase your confidence.

What happens if you ignore all the advice in this book? What if you don't take steps to increase your self-confidence? Is it really such a big deal?

Well actually, yes.

As you're about to find out.

Imagine the scene. You're reading a job advert. It sounds like a great opportunity. You're ideally suited to the job. Well, almost. There's one area of experience that you lack. You focus on this one area.

Then the internal chatter begins.

"There'll clearly be others who apply who are more suitable than me. If only I had more experience. Mind you, I'd hate to be at an interview and get exposed due to my lack of knowledge. Anyway, there'll be hundreds of applicants and my CV is out of date. I'll leave it for now."

Imagine the scene. Your boss is keen for either you or your colleague to make a short presentation at the annual company conference. It's being held in Paris this year and it would be a brilliant opportunity to make a name for yourself and raise your profile within the company.

Then the internal chatter begins.

"I hate making presentations. All those people looking at me. I'd be awful with my nerves. What would I say? I don't want to look like a fool in front of all my colleagues – I'd never live down the embarrassment. Sam's really good at presentations, nothing seems to faze her. I guess she'll be the one that gets all the glory. Never mind, these conferences are always a good laugh – and they usually have a free bar on the last night."

Imagine the scene. You're at the pub. You and a group of mates have hooked up with a few friends you knew from college. Lisa catches your eye. You've always liked her, but it's been a while since you last saw each other. There's a definite attraction. Lisa looks in your direction and smiles.

Then the internal chatter begins.

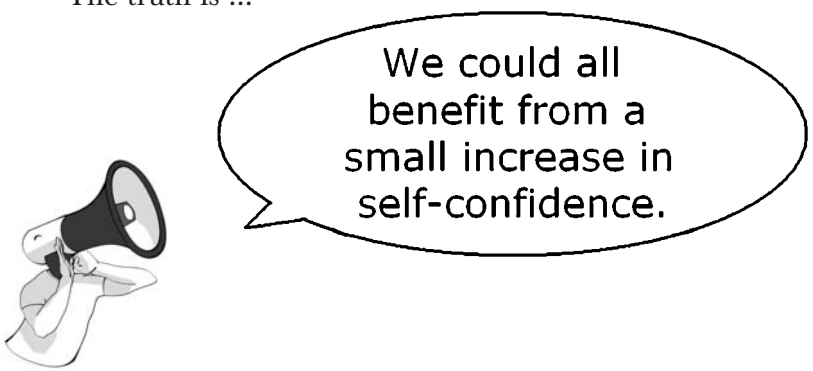
"She's way out of my league. She used to go out with Martin. Why would she be interested in me? OK, so she's smiling at me. She's probably just being friendly. I bet she feels sorry for me. I couldn't ask her out. No way. What if she turned me down? I'd never hear the last of it from my mates. Think I'll leave it this time."

So you don't apply for the job. You don't make the presentation. You don't ask the person out on a date.

Has your world ended? No. Are you a failure? No. Will it now be impossible to live a fulfilled life? No.

But be honest. Would a little more self-confidence have helped? I'm not talking about arrogance, brashness or becoming a raving extrovert. I'm talking about confidence. That sense of being OK about yourself. That awareness that it's OK to fail. That understanding that rejection doesn't mean the end of the world.

The truth is ...



A 10 percent increase could make all the difference.

It means you might have gone for the job. It means you might have made the presentation. It means you might have embarked on a romantic relationship.

You Don't Have to Be Ill

As I'm fond of saying, "You don't have to be ill to get better." You see, I'm not suggesting you have major

problems with self-confidence. Nor am I suggesting that you're paranoid about speaking in public or taking risks. You may in fact be fairly happy and content in life.

But maybe there's more. More to do. More to become.

And what might be stopping you? Not enough self-belief and confidence?

That's where a small increase could make all the difference. Not an extreme personality makeover. A small change. That's all.

Let me put it another way. Have a look at the following diagram.



As the diagram illustrates, a small increase in your self-confidence will, *over time*, make a big difference to where you are in life (B). A further small change and *over time* you will find yourself in a significantly different place (C) from where you might otherwise have been (A).

Your original destination (A) may still be a great place to be, but small changes today can take you further in your journey. B and C could represent activities and opportunities that you never dreamt were possible, but they demonstrate how a small change now can literally transform your future.

Let me put it another way.

You're on a ship heading from the UK to New York. But when the ship sets sail it's just a few degrees off course. If it remains off course you end up somewhere in the Caribbean. That's approximately 1,500 miles from New York.

A small change in direction (or confidence) can lead to a completely different destination.



- What could be happening in your life if you were at point B or point C?
- Write down three benefits to you if your confidence could increase by 10 percent.
- Imagine one activity or scenario that would happen if you had more confidence.
- Imagine how you'd feel if you didn't make any attempt to increase your confidence.

It's like most things in life, they add up. Let's say you currently weigh 75 kg and over the next ten years you increase your weight by 2 kg a year. At first you would hardly notice the small increase in weight. But over time you and other people would notice. It might happen gradually and you can adjust your clothes accordingly – but the bottom line is that in ten years' time you would be 20 kg heavier. Your life and your health could be radically different from where you are now.

A small increase makes a big difference.

Here's another illustration.

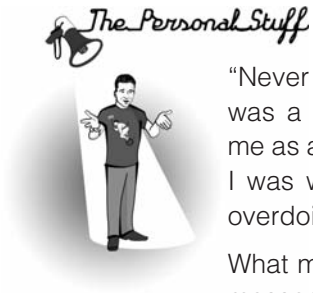
Ever make your own bread? As I've found to my cost, the bread won't rise without yeast.

You only need a small amount of yeast, but without it you've got flat bread.

That's how our lives can be without confidence. We fail to rise. We fail to achieve our potential.

I'll say it again. A small change over time makes a big difference.

This book is about how you can make those small changes to your life and enjoy the benefits of doing so.



"Never forget that the world's your oyster." It was a message my mum used to drum into me as a child. To be fair, interrupting me while I was watching *The Magic Roundabout* was overdoing it at times – but she meant well.

What motivated her to keep on repeating this message? Well, I'm not sure my mum had a great deal of self-confidence. Neither did she get a lot of encouragement in her own childhood but I sense that she was determined that her lack should not be my legacy.

From an early age she spotted that I had a talent for and an interest in acting and telling stories. She did all she could to encourage me. She made it clear that waiting around for things to happen wasn't a great recipe for success. If you want something, go out and get it.

But as you'll see later in this book, I still grew up with feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. I was plagued by a swarm of self-doubt in relation to my appearance, my weight and my poor manual dexterity.

However, in one particular area of life I felt good. I felt confident. In fact, I felt very confident. That was speaking in front of people.

I had an ability in this area and, more importantly, I had the encouragement to use and develop it. And when ability meets encouragement, you've got a pretty potent weapon.

Wouldn't you agree?

Nevertheless, talent didn't dramatically manifest itself one day. It grew over time.

It started with school plays. First as a shepherd, but then as Buttons in the school Christmas production of Cinderella (it was one of the leading roles, I promise you). It's influenced my whole life ever since, as the following story illustrates.

I was having coffee with Sue. She worked for a TV company. Halfway through my caffè latte she took a phone call. I surveyed the sights and sounds of Manchester and sought to feign a complete lack of interest in Sue's less than private telephone conversation.

The call ended and Sue brought me up to speed.

"That's a guy I know who works on the *Question Time* TV programme with David Dimbleby. The bloke they normally use as the audience warm-up man has gone off sick. They need a replacement. I'll have to ring Ted and see if he's available."

Ted was not available. They had a problem.

She looked at me. "Do you fancy doing it, Paul?"

"What, me?" I asked, summoning up all my powers to appear humble and rather nonchalant about her request. "But Sue, I'm not a stand-up comedian. I've never been a warm-up man before."

To be honest, it wasn't a genuine objection but more a desire to gain some reassurance from Sue. It worked.

"You don't need to be a comedian. It's a *Question Time* audience. They just need a little bit of er … em. … warming up, I guess. Just tell a few stories, get them laughing a little and think of something that involves them talking to each other."

That's all I had to hear. I didn't need any further convincing. I felt confident in my abilities to do a good job.

I even had an idea for an ice breaker. I'd split the audience into pairs and get them discussing the following: If a Martian came down from Mars (which is presumably where they're from) and asked you to give a definition of the word "politician", what would your answer be?

Once they replied I could give them my answer:

Politician comes from the word "politics", which can be broken down as follows:

Poli meaning many
Tics meaning blood-sucking parasites.

The next evening I was indeed the warm-up man for the *Question Time* programme. It went really well. The audience loved my definition of politics. I had the opportunity to meet, talk, work and then later enjoy dinner with David Dimbleby. It was a great evening.

But it was an evening that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't had the confidence to say "yes".

I know what you're thinking: "You were lucky. You were having coffee with Sue when she took the call."

You're right, I was. But I don't see that as luck – I see it as an opportunity. An opportunity that I could always have decided to say no to. But I didn't.

The fact is that the world is **your** oyster. The little kid who started off life playing a shepherd in a school play could always end up working with the BBC.



- Have you ever had an opportunity that you really wanted to take but you said no rather than yes?
- What stopped you saying yes?
- Imagine you had taken the opportunity and it had turned out really well. What would the benefits to you have been?

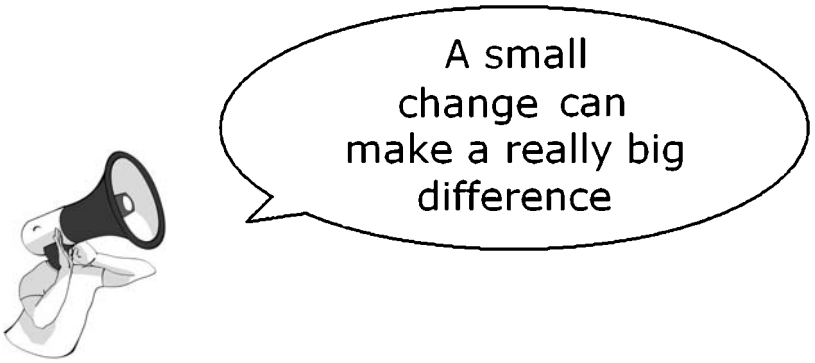
Self-Confidence is the Key

As the previous story illustrates, having an opportunity helps. Having ability was pretty important as well.

But ultimately, the key was having the self-confidence to say "yes". It was having the confidence and belief in my own abilities and potential, even though I had never done that work before.

So did that experience change my life? No, it didn't. But it certainly enhanced it. By saying yes, I proved to myself what I was capable of doing. It gave me the self-belief to seize other opportunities. I grew in confidence. And I promise you, there will be times when having the self-confidence to take action and seize the opportunity *will* change your life.

The truth is ...



Self-Confidence – What it will and won't lead to

It won't lead to you

- Being transformed into Superman or Wonder Woman.
- Floating through life from one success to another.
- Being immune to setbacks and challenges.
- Never having to feel disappointed, despondent or dejected.
- Taking unnecessary and uncalculated risks.
- Feeling you must have all the answers.
- Feeling you always have to be an extrovert when deep down you're an introvert.

It will put you in a better position to

- Attempt new things and discover new places.
- Discover talents you never knew you had.
- Seize new opportunities.

- Become a more enjoyable person to be around.
- Feel better about yourself.
- Fulfill your potential and discover your purpose in life.
- Make a positive difference in the lives of others.



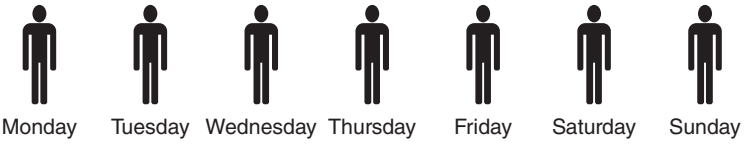
- Which of the above benefits of increased self-confidence are most important to you right now? (Tick your top three.)
- Why did you pick those particular ones?
- What are the consequences for you personally if you don't grow in confidence?

How Confidence can Help You Make the Most of Life

I first used the next illustration in my SUMO book, but it's worth revisiting. Imagine seven people lined up in a row.



Now imagine that each person represents a day of the week.



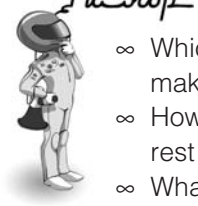
Now for the potentially scary part. Imagine that each day of the week represents a decade of your life.



So which day of the week are you on in your life? At the time of writing I'm on Friday lunchtime. I've still got the weekend to look forward to, and I'm hoping to add a couple of extra days to my week by having a bank holiday Monday and Tuesday!

It puts things into perspective, doesn't it?

The challenge is to make the most of your journey, whatever day you're on. What that journey looks like and what experiences it involves will be influenced by lots of factors – particularly your level of confidence.



- Which day of the week are you on? How does that make you feel?
- How determined are you to make the most of the rest of your journey?
- What has a lack of self-confidence prevented you from achieving so far?
- Look out for ideas in this book to enhance your journey and use them to help others as well.

It's Time for Some Honesty

Let's turn the spotlight onto you.

Maybe life is going fairly well for you at the moment. Great. But could an increase in self-confidence open up opportunities you're not even aware of yet? A new job? Promotion? New business? New home? New partner? (Although I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with your current one if you have one.)

Could a good life become a great one?

On the other hand, maybe life isn't going well for you at present. Maybe it's become a bit of a struggle. Perhaps your life feels a bit like a game of snakes and ladders – except there's a distinct lack of ladders on the board.

If that's the case, self-confidence will be crucial to your recovery.

But where do you find it? Where are the ladders? What snakes have led you to the position you're in now?

Read on, because whether your self-confidence seems relatively good or is in need of a major boost, you're about to discover plenty of answers.

Unfortunately though, not all the answers and ideas for developing your self-confidence are particularly helpful – as you're about to discover.



∞ Everyone can benefit from an increase in self-confidence – you don't have to be ill to get better.

∞ Focus on the 10 percent difference – over time it makes a big impact.

∞ Increasing your self-confidence doesn't guarantee an easy ride in life, but it will improve the quality of the journey.

2 Taking the "Con" Out of Confidence



You're about to discover

The five big myths about confidence and how to debunk them.

Myth number one: Once you have confidence you can master anything.

Myth number two: Some people are just born confident.

Myth number three: Humility is the opposite of confidence.

Myth number four: There can be no room for self-doubt.

Myth number five: Alcohol gives you confidence.

Five Myths around Developing Self-Confidence

The world of self-help has grown massively in the last 20 years. It's a multibillion-dollar industry. There are some brilliant books available that I believe can have a profound effect on helping you make the most of life. But there's also a lot of crap out there.

You will find plenty of so-called gurus writing about the effortless way to achieve success or gain confidence. They give the impression that everything is easy and requires no effort. I disagree.

The truth is that a lot of people are happy to dispense their quick-fix solutions to complex problems. And it's easy to be seduced by their false promises. It's also easy to become disillusioned very quickly.

Here are a few myths we need to debunk as we aim to take the con out of confidence.

Myth Number One: Once You Have Confidence You can Master Anything

I wish this were true, but it's not. I'm a fairly confident person, but no matter how confident I become, I will never be able to run the 100 metres in under 10 seconds, sing like Pavarotti or bend a ball like David Beckham.

You see, confidence is crucial to our success, but so too is competence.

Let me explain.

Confidence without Competence = Delusion

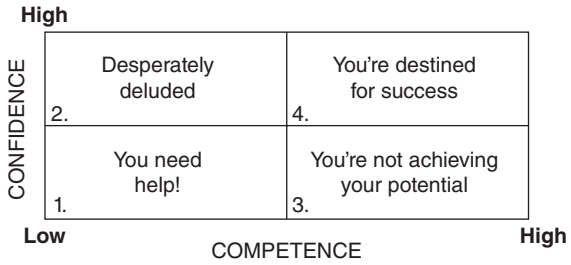
To see examples of this, watch the early rounds of a reality music talent show on television. They're overflowing with talentless, self-deluded people with shedloads of confidence. But confidence is not enough. We also need ability.

Sadly, there's also the flipside.

Competence without Confidence = Unfulfilled Potential

This scenario is a real tragedy: people who possess the capability but lack the self-belief to use it.

To illustrate this further, the confidence and competence matrix may help.



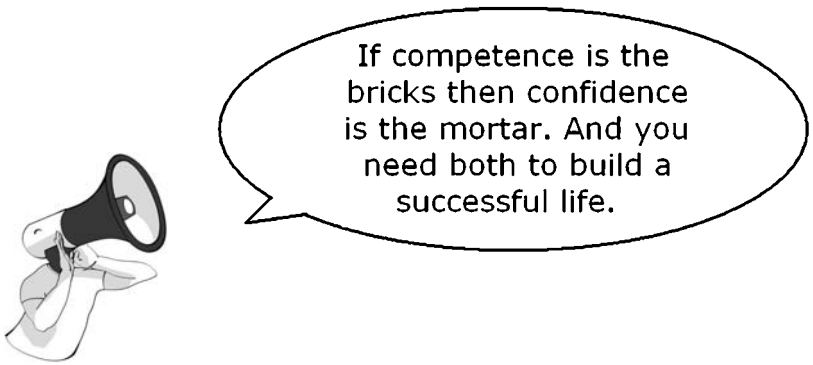
1 Low competence and low confidence = You need help!
2 Low competence and high confidence = You're desperately deluded.

3 High competence and low confidence = You're not achieving your potential.
4 High competence and high confidence = You're destined for success.

Confidence can be crucial to success, but it's not the only key to achieving it. You also need to develop competence. Self-confidence might spur you on to seek help and support from others, but ultimately it's developing your skills and learning from experience that will cement your success.

And that takes **time** and **effort** – no matter what other gurus tell you.

The truth is ...



Myth Number Two: Some People are Just Born Confident

There is a certain amount of truth in this statement. On a very basic level, some children are born more towards the

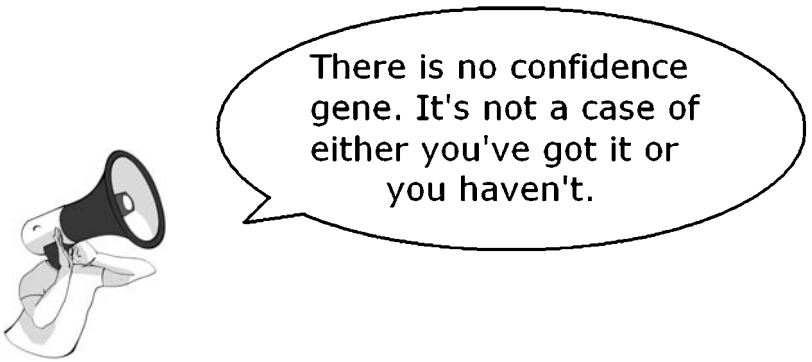
extrovert end of the spectrum, while others are more towards the introvert.

However, being an extrovert doesn't equate to you automatically being confident. You may be predisposed to being more socially confident and comfortable around people, but as we'll see in the next chapter, it's also quite easy to have your confidence crushed by others.

Equally, a more introverted person may feel less comfortable being around people than an extrovert, but that doesn't mean that with the right encouragement, opportunity and environment, they won't grow in confidence.

Here's the bottom line: Whatever our predisposition and personality type when we're born, everyone has the capability to increase their self-confidence.

The truth is ...



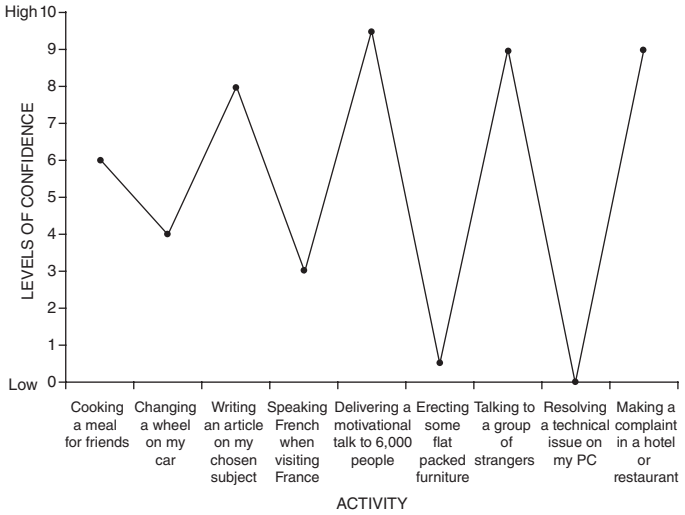
The "you are born confident" myth also fails to take into account the following factors.

Confidence is situational

If I had to rate myself on a scale of 1–10 in terms of how confident I felt in any given situation – 1 = Low/uncomfortable, 10 = High/very confident – my ratings would vary and my list would look something like this. Rate yourself as well, and see how you compare with my scores.

Situation	My score	Your score
Cooking a meal for friends	6	
Changing a wheel on my car	4	
Writing an article on my chosen subject	8	
Speaking French when visiting France	3	
Delivering a motivational talk to 6,000 people	9.5	
Erecting some flat-packed furniture	0.5	
Talking to a group of strangers	9	
Resolving a technical issue on my PC	0	
Making a complaint in a hotel or restaurant	9	

Plot those results on a chart and it would look something like this.



Some people perceive me as confident because they see me in a work setting (where in all humility I believe I'm highly competent) or in a social gathering (where due to my personality and previous experience I do feel generally very comfortable).

My mum always encouraged me to engage with adults when I was a child. My job demands that I meet and greet delegates when they arrive at events. As I attempt to make them feel at ease, it also has the same effect on me.

In other words, I've grown in confidence – I wasn't born that way.

The same goes for you.

You will notice from the above list that my confidence levels fluctuate depending on:

- What I'm doing
- Who I'm doing it for
- My levels of experience and knowledge

You could probably plot your own confidence scores throughout the day and see how much they vary depending on what you're doing at the time. It's ridiculous to suggest that either you're confident or you're not.



- Do you simply label yourself or others as being confident or not being confident?
- How will seeing confidence as situational benefit you?
- Write down something you need to develop your competence in so that your confidence will grow in that area.

Myth Number Three: Humility is the Opposite of Confidence

A retired Premiership football referee happily confessed on radio that even if a referee makes a mistake they should never admit to it. His reasoning? People won't have confidence in you if you admit you got something wrong. To own up to a mistake would be a sign of weakness.

What utter garbage.

The phrase “being confident means never admitting your mistakes” belongs in the same dustbin as “love means never having to say you’re sorry”.

You see, there’s a fine line between self-confidence and arrogance. And when you think maintaining your confidence means you can’t admit to making mistakes, you’ve just crossed it.

In my book, humility is not about appearing weak, putting yourself down or allowing people to walk all over you. Humility is about having a healthy regard for yourself. It’s about being confident and secure in the knowledge that it’s OK to make mistakes – and not being arrogant enough to believe that you’ll never make any. It’s having the confidence to admit that there are some areas in life where you may have very little confidence in your ability at the moment (erecting flat-packed furniture springs to mind for me), but you’re not going to beat yourself up over it.

Humility and self-confidence may seem like an unlikely marriage, but they actually make a great couple.

The fact is in certain areas of your life you won’t grow in confidence until you have the humility to recognise that you need the help of others.

However, sometimes your search for help doesn’t always provide you with the answers you’re looking for. There are a few whacky ideas on how to increase your confidence, as you’re about to discover.





I guess it all started with Derek. In the annals of history there were no MP3s, iPods or CDs, there were audio cassette tapes.

Derek, my ex-boss from Dudley, suggested that I listen to some tapes by a British guy called Richard Denny. He was a motivational speaker and his area of specialism was "sales".

I don't remember much of what he said, but there was one phrase he used. I've never forgotten it.

"Within every adversity, there is a seed of equal or greater opportunity."

I had just lost my job. I needed inspiration. I needed hope. That quote gave me some.

It started me on a journey into the sometimes slightly strange and occasionally whacky world of self-help and personal development. If I'm honest, it triggered an obsession.

Some people follow their football team home and away. Others stand on deserted railway platforms or buy shoes by the truckload. Not me. My passion was personal development – and I was hooked, big time.

I listened to a lot of American speakers. I read their books. I even went on to attend their live seminars in far-flung places such as Yorkshire. In fact, I heard so many American speakers I even began to sound and act like one.

It was bizarre. I started doing high-fives – with myself. I chewed gum and when I went shopping I said "Have a nice day" to the 17-year-old check-out girl at the

supermarket. (However, I drew the line at having my teeth whitened and walking around with a permanent grin.)

Still, I found the material incredibly helpful. And when you have no job, a mystery illness and are living on invalidity benefit, you're glad of any help you can get.

I listened to a tape by a guy called Randy from California. For some reason, despite the passing of time, his name has always stuck with me. He spoke about building self-esteem and confidence. Without them, he argued, we are doomed to live a life of misery and unfulfilled potential. (I'm a Bradford City supporter, so his words seemed particularly pertinent.)

Randy spoke a lot about the negative impact of low self-esteem and confidence, not just for ourselves but for society as a whole. But there was an answer. There was a way to claim back what was rightfully ours. There was a way to awaken the sleeping giant within each and every one of us.

I sat alone in my kitchen, completely engrossed by his message. My heightened state of excitement and anticipation raised my body temperature. I removed my anorak.

And then Randy delivered his life-changing strategy. It involved …

Wait for it …

Standing naked in front of a mirror.

What people listening to Randy as they drove to work thought of this, I'm not sure. Perhaps some, desperate that their life of unfulfilled potential should not last a second longer, pulled over to the side of the road and

began undressing. If questioned by the police they could always rewind the tape: "Listen to this for yourself, officer. Randy's a motivational speaker from California. I'm raising my self-esteem as we speak."

But Randy didn't want us just to stand naked. He wanted us to affirm every part of our body by touching it and saying:

I affirm these ankles, I accept them I value them.

I affirm these knees, I accept them I value them.

I affirm these thighs, I accept them I value them.

I affirm these testi …

I think you get Randy's point.

As I sat alone in the kitchen with only my Madonna wall calendar for company, small pockets of Mancunian cynicism bubbled to the surface. Stand naked in front of a mirror? Affirm every part of my body whilst touching it? I wanted to build my confidence, not join a cult.

I was humble enough to realize I needed help, but I hadn't quite reached enough of a desperation point that I'd try anything.



- Come up with your own definition of humility. Humility is …
- How easy do you find it asking others for help?
- Have you ever come across whacky advice on how to boost your confidence? If so, what was it?

Myth Number Four: There can be No Room for Self-Doubt

Being wracked with self-doubt isn't a great recipe for success. But, perhaps surprisingly, it's both healthy and helpful to have a small degree of self-doubt.

It prevents complacency. It can motivate you to improve and to want to get better. In fact, it's quite normal to have a degree of self-doubt – it's what makes us human. (The exception to the above I guess could be in a sporting event at a crucial stage of the game. Acknowledging or allowing even a small degree of self-doubt to enter your thinking when you're about to serve for the match, take a penalty or kick for goal could be debilitating.)

You'd be surprised how seemingly successful and outwardly confident people still wrestle with self-doubt, as the following story reveals.



cently finished reading a fascinating y the British comedian Frank Skinner. I if you make a living standing in front of ds, and in Frank's case thousands, of trying to make them laugh, it's only to assume that there can be no room -doubt. Right?

Wrong.

In his book, *Frank Skinner on the Road* (published by Century), he talks about a review of a show that read: "Frank Skinner is, to all intents and purposes, a comedy God."

What does Frank focus on? The phrase "comedy God"? No, he focuses on the words "to all intents and purposes". He wrestles with what those words actually mean and whether indeed the review is as positive as it first seems. In fact, because of such mental gymnastics Frank does his upmost to avoid reading any reviews of his work.

In a way far better than I could ever express, he goes on to write about his relationship with self-doubt:

> *Doubt is my constant sidekick. I doubt my work, my faith, my relationships. If you're a human being, doubt comes with the job, doesn't it? When Jesus was dying on the cross, he suddenly looks up and shouts "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Even Jesus! And then he dies. He couldn't die until he'd become wholly human; and he couldn't be wholly human until he'd experienced doubt.*

This may be one of the most important "secrets" about self-confidence: a certain degree of doubt is both normal and natural.

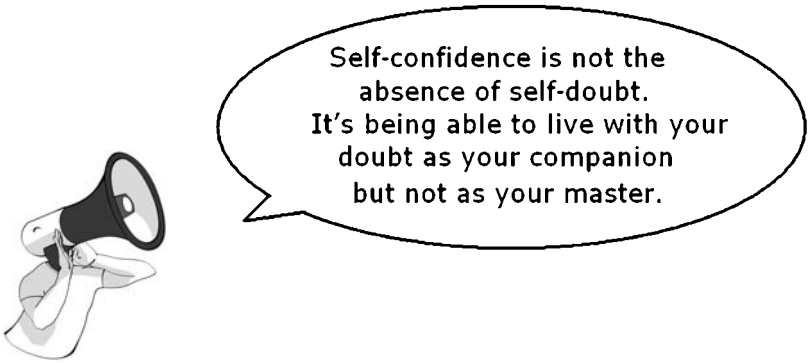
When you next see someone who appears to be "together", relaxed and super-confident (like a stand-up comedian in front of several thousand people), remember beneath that façade is a human being who might well be wrestling with the same inadequacies and insecurities as you are.

However

this next point is crucial.

That person still has enough self-confidence not to allow their insecurities to rob them of the opportunity to achieve success and fulfill their potential.

The truth is ...



Myth Number Five: Alcohol Gives You Confidence

Richard and I were out for a drink recently.

"What are you having, mate?" I asked.

"I'll have a pint of Courage please Paul."

If only it were that easy, I thought – being able to order courage or confidence by the pint.

But alcohol is the route to confidence for some people. It often goes by the name of Dutch courage. One glass may take the edge off their nerves, but some people don't stop at one drink. Before they know it they're feeling extremely confident in themselves.

That's the problem when the only source of your confidence is alcohol. You overestimate your own abilities and you underestimate the potential negative consequences of your actions. Alcohol-fuelled confidence has conned you into a false sense of security and of your own infallibility and immortality.

Let's acknowledge the pleasure that alcohol can bring but also the pain. In terms of developing confidence, it's a quick-fix solution with some potentially negative long-term consequences.



in A Nutshell

When you're growing in self-confidence you need to remember:

- Mastering confidence doesn't mean you can master anything – it's linked to competence and will fluctuate depending on your ability and the context of your situation.
- There is no confidence gene – you're not born confident. No matter where you start from, everyone can grow in confidence.
- Humility is not the opposite of self-confidence. They're an unlikely but necessary partnership.

- There *can* be room for self-doubt in the midst of self-confidence. Just remember not to let it become your master.
- The positive effects of alcohol are temporary, but the negative effects could last a lifetime.
- You don't have to dance naked to grow in confidence (unless you really want to, that is).

So Far

- We've explored why self-confidence is a big deal.
- We've debunked some modern myths around confidence.

Now we're going to take time to reflect on what – or perhaps more accurately *who* – has influenced your current level of self-confidence.

3 Who Crushed Your Confidence? Your Upbringing



You're about to discover

Why looking back can help you move forward.

How your beliefs affect your confidence.

The impact of your upbringing on what you think about yourself.

Why some people are "Awfulisers" and how to deal with them.

Having worked as both a counsellor and a performance coach, I'm convinced that if we want to understand ourselves and why we sometimes lack confidence, then we must be prepared to revisit some potentially challenging previous experiences.

Doing so could make us feel a little uncomfortable but let me explain why it's so important that we do.

We all have a story. We all have a history, a set of experiences from the past that shape and influence who we are today.

For you, it may have been a relatively pleasant journey so far. Your story is full of positive memories, with only the occasional blip. For others, the journey has resembled a roller-coaster of highs and lows. And for some people, the journey so far (to use an earlier metaphor) has been a bit like playing a game of snakes and ladders – except without the ladders.

Maybe you had a difficult childhood.
Maybe you've failed an exam or screwed up at school.
Maybe you married young and lived to regret it.
Maybe you feel you've never done as well in life as your brother or sister.
Maybe you've been made redundant.
Maybe your partner walked out on you and the kids.
Maybe lots of things have happened to you that you wish had just never happened. But they have.

Put quite simply, you have a choice. These experiences can destroy your confidence, or they can awaken it. Your past can make you bitter or it can make you better.

So what's it to be?

The goal of this book is to help you move forward and grow in self-confidence. But before we move into first gear, we're going to go into reverse. We're going back in order to help us move forward.

And beware, there will be some navel gazing along the way. When you navel gaze you may discover some "navel fluff", which is another way of saying you may find some stuff from your past that you would prefer to ignore.

But, in order to understand where we are, it's useful to understand where we've come from and how we got here. When we do that, moving on becomes so much easier. In some ways it's a bit like an illness – once it's been diagnosed we're in a much better position to treat it. Likewise, once we've found the causes for our lack of confidence you can do something about it.

I'm not suggesting that we examine every aspect of our past and hold our parents or whoever up for derision because of some minor misdemeanour on their part. (If the misdemeanour was major, then you should probably seek some professional help.)

Neither is this a competition for who can navel gaze the longest. Navel gazing is necessary, but it's temporary. As

a process it's more of a holiday fling, not a lifetime commitment.

Our goal is to learn from our past, not wallow in it. Acknowledge your pain if that's what you need to do, but you don't have to relive it in detail.

So are you ready? Seat belt fastened? Tray in the upright position?

Good. Because we're about to embark on the "Explain Game". It's a game that will provide plenty of clues and insights as to why you sometimes lack self-confidence. Once you have an understanding of the causes for your lack of confidence, you're in a better position to deal with them. Discovering an explanation puts you in a better position to find a solution rather than simply playing the role of victim. However, just make sure you avoid a similar-sounding but far more destructive pastime, the "Blame Game".

Let's start by looking at something that influences every aspect of our lives. We've all got them, but rarely do we take time to understand how we acquired them.

What am I talking about? Your beliefs.

How Beliefs Affect Your Confidence

What you believe about yourself, the world and other people can have a profound affect on your level of self-confidence. My friend Rob Whittaker says:

"***If we believe a lie it might as well be the truth for the impact it has on us."***

David Page once believed a lie. He didn't realize it was a lie at the time – he believed it was the truth. Let me explain.

I came across his story in the national papers. While digging in his yard, he picked up what looked like a classic example of a Second World War mine. In that split second before he realized the danger, he pressed the button on the top. Fearing that releasing the button would cause the bomb to detonate, he carried it to a shed and awkwardly strapped masking tape to his thumb to secure it firmly.

He then called 999. Sobbing on the phone, he told the woman police operator, "Tell my family I love them, if the worst comes to the worst." (He had a wife and five children.)

He was eventually put through to an Army expert on unexploded bombs, who confirmed that he should not take his thumb off the button under any circumstances.

Police, fire and ambulance officers arrived at the yard and a senior policeman (in rank, not age) helped David put his arm and the mine into a barrel of sand in order to lessen the likely damage if the bomb exploded.

Scary stuff, eh? Apparently it was four agonizing hours before the army bomb disposal squad arrived.

Four hours is a long time to wait. That guy must have been going through hell. Would he survive? If so, would he lose his arm?

His wife Jane supplied him with a hot water bottle and a blanket. I presume that was to keep him warm, as I doubt either item would be much use in an explosion.

When the army bomb disposal team arrived, they removed his arm from the barrel of sand and then the tape from his thumb.

Risky?

Not really.

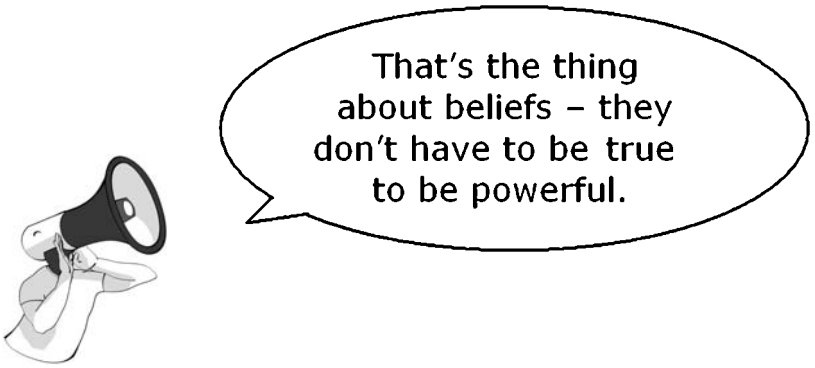
Why?

Because they identified that what David Page was holding was not in fact an unexploded Second World War mine but part of a hydraulic system from an old Citroën car.

Recalling his ordeal, David Page said, "I was absolutely terrified that I would be blown into a million pieces – I was looking into the sky thinking my life was over."

To go back to Rob Whittaker's quote for a moment, "If we believe a lie, it might as well be the truth for the impact it has on us."

The truth is ...



Here's what's interesting about the word "beliefs". If you write it in a certain way, you suddenly realize something:

BE LIE FS

In other words, there can be a lie in the midst of your beliefs.

Sadly, some of the beliefs people have about themselves rob them of their confidence. Beliefs such as:

- Things always go wrong for me.
- I'm as thick as two short planks of wood.
- I'm ugly.
- I'll never do anything with my life.
- I can't change.
- I'll never be as good as ...
- My best years are behind me.

Maybe it's time to question the truth about such beliefs and expose them for what they really are – lies.



- Which of the above statements could you identify with?
- What are the ramifications for you in having those beliefs?
- Who do you know who has some of these beliefs about themselves?
- What other beliefs do you have that could be having a negative effect on you?

Who Influences Your Beliefs about Yourself?

Lots of factors influence your beliefs about yourself. Here are four of them:

- Your upbringing
- Your school days
- The media
- Yourself

All four have the power to have a positive impact on us – but on the flipside, they also have the potential to crush or erode our confidence.

This chapter focuses on your upbringing. Section Two explores the impact of your time at school, the media and how you affect your own confidence.

To introduce the impact of your upbringing, let's go into some personal stuff.



This is Tony's story:

My mum remarried when I was eight years old. Her new husband, Jim, had never had children of his own. At first he seemed to like me. He had an interest in football and I guess looking back I thought that would be something we could do together. I loved playing football at school and when I told Jim how well I was doing, it seemed to meet with his approval. In fact, the better I said I played, the more approval I gained.

I think I probably exaggerated how well I was doing, but when you're desperate for some recognition, "bigging yourself up" seems perfectly acceptable.

But after the initial honeymoon period, things turned sour. Jim watched me play a couple of times. He wasn't impressed.

I'm not sure what other factors came into play, but two years down the line we were hardly speaking to each other. What few words he did say to me were confined solely to the mocking variety. If Jim's character were like a hot drink, it would best be described as a "large moccha with a double shot of cynicism".

By the age of ten I was acquiring a bit of puppy fat. I didn't see it as much of a problem to begin with – in fact, I probably wasn't even aware of it until Jim started calling me "the big fat nancy boy" in his mocking tone. In some ways I could understand his comments about my weight,

but not the term “nancy boy”. However, as I avoided fights at school and didn’t especially enjoy climbing trees or getting covered in mud, I guess in his eyes I must have been one.

I owned a bike. I was desperate to ride it more often. But Jim said I couldn’t ride it. By that, I don’t mean that he didn’t allow me to ride it – he just believed (on what evidence I’m not sure) that I was physically incapable of riding one. Maybe that fitted in with his definition of a nancy boy. Nevertheless, I insisted I could ride and wanted to prove it.

One day my mum and Jim agreed to watch me ride my bike up the road. After an initial shaky start, I gradually grew in confidence and began to ride without wobbling. At one stage I even took one hand off the handlebars to demonstrate my confidence. As I cycled back towards them I beamed with a sense of pride and satisfaction.

I expected to be greeted with approval. None came.

“You were hopeless,” barked Jim. “You’re not safe to be on the road.”

Not wanting to cause a scene, Mum remained quiet. Although I couldn’t explain it at the time, I think on reflection that, due to her overprotecting nature, she was quite happy for me not to ride a bike. Not out of spite, but out of a genuine desire for my safety.

I didn’t ride my bike for four years. When my mates went for a bike ride I used to run behind them. By the time I was given permission to ride one it was too small for me.

Finally, I got myself another bike and within two weeks I had my first puncture. I’d never fixed a puncture before. I’d never been shown how to fix one.

My mum persuaded Jim to show me how. He was to teaching what cannibals are to vegetarianism. I don't actually remember him showing me what to do, but what remains permanently etched on my mind as he stood watching my attempts was his barrage of mocking diatribe: "pathetic", "hopeless", "the nancy boy can't do it". Whoever wrote "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" clearly hadn't met my stepfather.

And the consequences of my encounters with Jim?

To this day I'm sensitive about my weight. I've never been particularly practical – maybe with some encouragement I might have been, but I shy away from it now. It's taken me years to recover my sense of self-confidence and even now I dread it if my own son's bike has a puncture.

I'm 45 years old now. My mum divorced Jim. I've only mentioned a couple of episodes. There were many more. I sometimes think about tracking him down and telling him how his psychological abuse affected me.

It's painful to read Tony's story. It illustrates the effect of an event that happened when he was young and impressionable and that still has an impact on him today. His beliefs about himself, his levels of self-confidence about his appearance and his competence to carry out a practical task were all shaped by an episode from the past.

I know Tony well. We work in a similar industry. His self-confidence may have been crushed, but meeting him now, you would never know the anguish he suffered as a child. He's a brilliant example of how you can recover and rebuild your confidence. In the later chapters you'll discover how to do that.

How Your Upbringing Influences Your Beliefs and Your Self-Confidence

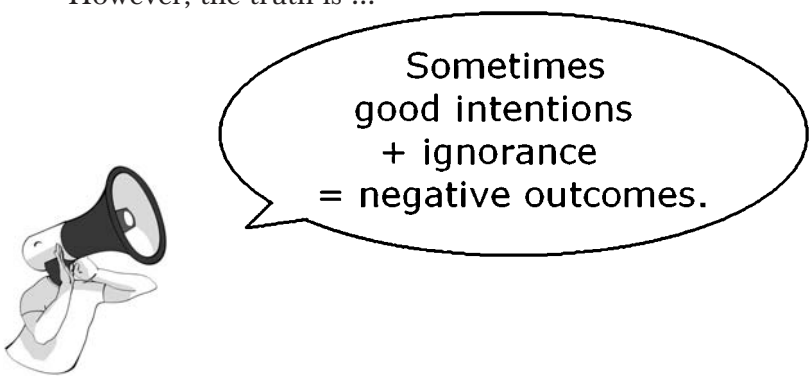
Tony's story illustrates the power and impact of parents, or in his case a step-parent.

I was reading about the upbringing of a successful British comedian. He described his father, who died when the comedian was 17, as intimidating and curt. He lamented that his dad was not around to see what he'd achieved, but then added, "I wonder if I would have been this successful if my dad had still been alive. Maybe I wouldn't have had the confidence."

Sad, eh?

I believe that the majority of what parents do for their children is done with good intentions. There are obviously a number of exceptions to that, but overall I'm confident that when Mum or Dad gets out of bed in the morning, they're not thinking, "How can I screw up my kid's life today?"

However, the truth is ...



Despite well-meaning intentions, the baggage and negative beliefs that the members of your family carry with them can be automatically passed down to you. Let's find out more.

Was Your Mum an Awfuliser?

What is an Awfuliser? It's not a word you'll come across in the dictionary. In fact, I made it up. Here's how you'll recognize one.

Awfulisers have a habit of turning a minor setback into a drama or a crisis. They tend to be life's worriers. Their favourite phrase is "That's awful." They have an uncanny ability to escalate the seriousness of an issue and in doing so they can leave you feeling – and this is the key point – *less confident* and less able to deal with your challenges.

Working with an Awfuliser can be challenging. Being in a long-term relationship with one isn't exactly fun at times either. But what if one of your parents is one? What if the person who is perceived in most cultures as the care giver and nurturer – that is, your mum – suffers from these tendencies?

What is the impact on you?
How does it influence your view of the world?
How does it influence your beliefs about yourself and your levels of confidence?

By the way, I'm not specifically having a pop at mums, it's just that *in my experience* (and I haven't conducted any clinical research into the matter), mothers generally have more of a tendency to exhibit this behaviour than fathers. This might not be your experience, which is fine. But whoever that person was, if they were your main care provider, the impact will be the same.

Before I dig up any more naval fluff and before you reach for the phone to give your mum (or whoever) some feedback, remember the following:

First, we're playing the "Explain Game" right now. The box marked "Blame Game" needs to remain locked away in the cupboard.

Secondly, finding someone to blame from your past won't help you grow in self-confidence. It may simply serve as an excuse to justify why you're not confident.

Here's something else worth considering. Most parents who are Awfulisers are the product of their own Awfulising parents. They're simply passing down their own hand-me-downs, which in this case is their attitude to life.

But now for the good news. You're the one who can help break the cycle. You have the insight, self-awareness and knowledge to stop passing on these harmful hand-me-down mindsets.



- Who in your family has a tendency to be an Awfuliser?
- How did and does that affect you?
- Who in your family is the antidote to the Awfuliser? Who has given you positive beliefs about yourself?

What Motivates an Awfuliser?

We need to understand that an Awfuliser's biggest fault is born out of good intentions. And their fault is?

They care.

Too much.

They over-care. They over-protect.

If they were a bird, all their chicks would be late developers. They'd struggle to have the heart to push their chicks out of the nest so that they could learn to fly, even though that's what birds are made to do.

As people, we're designed to grow, explore, take risks, learn, make mistakes, experience the joy of victory and the pain of defeat. But sometimes our growth is stunted and our progress stifled by the well-meaning but ultimately harmful over-protection of our mothers, fathers or people who care for us.

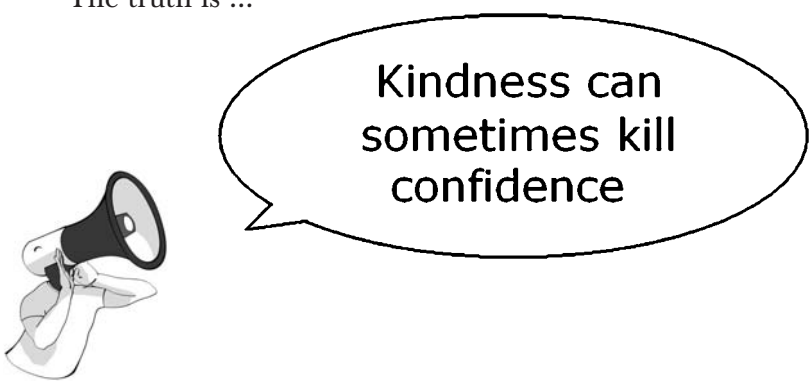
When an Awfuliser over-protects they are in fact neglecting their children's natural desire to grow and explore. They can end up with an 18-year-old adult with the self-confidence of a 10-year-old child.

However, let's get one thing straight. There are much worse things a parent can do to their children.

I'm also not suggesting a complete abandonment of your responsibilities as a parent. You're not going to say to your 3 year old, "Make your own way into town – there's a regular bus service. You'll thank me for this in years to come when you've scaled Everest."

But, there does come a point when parents need to see their children through different eyes and allow them to grow in responsibility.

The truth is ...



You can only allow people to grow when you withdraw some of your support and help them to discover their own internal resources to cope and survive. That doesn't mean that you abandon them – you don't withdraw *all* your support. But ultimately, if they are to learn how to fly they must first leave the nest.

What to Do if Your Mum was an Awfuliser

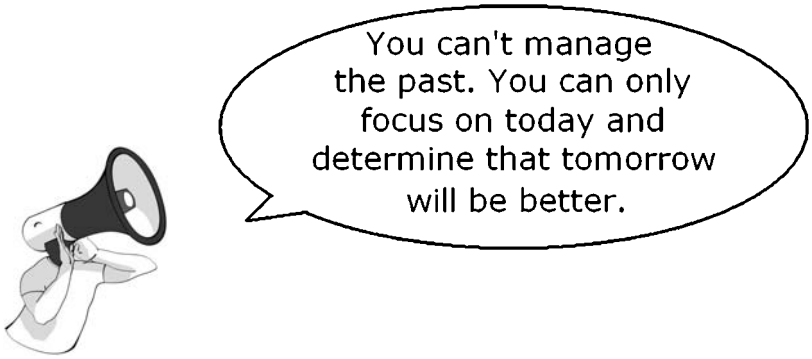
- Whether the Awfuliser was your mum, your dad, your granny, your uncle or your aunt, remember that their behaviour is not the sole reason for the person you are today.
- How you were brought up might not always have helped you develop your self-confidence, but people's behaviour towards you isn't definitive. Your destiny isn't determined by the actions of others but by how you respond to those actions.
- Remember, people often act out of ignorance rather than deliberate intention. They often repeat the same mistakes their parents made. Just make sure that you don't.
- Remind yourself that your parents (or care givers) are flawed – just like you.
- To create a sense of balance and perspective, think of three things a parent did for you that you really value and appreciate.

What to Do if *You're* an Awfuliser

We've spent some time examining the impact an Awfuliser can have on us. But I'm also conscious that we ourselves

might also have a tendency to Awfulise. And if we do, we in turn can be affecting the confidence of those around us.

So if you recognize that you're an Awfuliser, what can you do? First, remember that the truth is ...



The key is to become more aware of when you're awfulising. You may still have a tendency to look on the downside of a situation, but that doesn't mean you have to automatically share those thoughts with other people. You may think it – but you don't have to express it.

(I explore the concept of Awfulisers in more detail in a previous book, *SUMO (Shut Up, Move On) Your Relationships, How to Handle Not Strangle the People You Live and Work With.*)

That's one aspect of your past that may have led to your self-confidence being eroded or not allowed to flourish. But that's enough navel gazing in terms of your upbringing. It's time to explore how other people outside of your family may also have contributed to your lack of confidence.

in A Nutshell



∞ Your past experiences can make you bitter or better.

∞ Playing the "Explain Game" is helpful. Playing the "Blame Game" isn't.

∞ Beliefs can have a profound affect on you, and they don't have to be true to be powerful.

∞ How you're brought up can influence your beliefs and your self-confidence.

∞ Good intentions mixed with ignorance can lead to negative outcomes.

∞ Parents and other family members can pass on negative hand-me-down attitudes.

∞ You have the ability to create positive beliefs in the people around you.

4 Who Crushed Your Confidence? Other Influences



You're about to discover

How your school days affect your confidence.

How the media distorts reality and influences your confidence.

Why you can undermine your own self-confidence.

How Your School Days Affect Your Confidence

So far we've explored the power of beliefs and how they can affect your confidence. Our focus has been on the negative impact of beliefs, but they can also be very positive and life affirming.

I came across an article in *Reader's Digest* about the actor Denzel Washington. He talked about how the key to much of his success was self-confidence and how he'd been helped by teachers as he grew up.

He recalled his youth group leader, Charlie White, saying to him one day, "Denzel, with your intelligence, you can do anything you want."

Washington added, "I was ten years old at the time, but I never forgot what he said. You never know the power of words when you speak to young people."

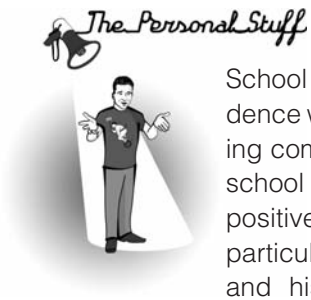
Clearly, those formative years as we're growing up can have a huge impact on us.

Most of us spend at least ten years at school. Isn't it interesting how many of those experiences you had then you can still vividly remember now? Certain teachers stand out, some for positive reasons but others for exactly the opposite. Who you spent time with in the playground or after school will also have influenced your outlook on life and on yourself.



- Think of three positive memories from school. How did these experiences affect you?
- Which negative experiences spring to mind? How did those experiences affect you?

Perhaps the best way to explore the impact of people during your school days is to focus on some personal stories.



School for me was a mixed bag. My confidence was boosted when I won several speaking competitions and took part in a number of school drama productions. And I have some positive memories of a number of teachers, particularly Mr Dart. He was my Maths teacher and his support and encouragement in a subject I struggled to master are something I remain hugely grateful for. Even now as I think about him, I smile.

Hopefully you had teachers like Mr Dart. It's important that you remind yourself of people like that in order to maintain your perspective.

However, this is a chapter about someone crushing your confidence and one teacher sadly, though I'm sure unintentionally, did precisely that to me.

In 1980 I was 15 years old and sitting my high school examinations. Up to that point, no one in our family had ever passed an "O" level (as GCSEs were known then). This situation certainly wasn't helped by the fact that no one in our family had ever actually sat an "O" level exam.

Initially I passed four "O" levels. It would have been five, but my pot blew up in the school kiln, so I missed out on Pottery (I got an unclassified, which is quite an achievement in that subject!). I was gutted. Therapy helped.

I scraped into the Sixth form to do my "A" levels. I realized that I'd done quite well to get that far in my academic journey. My mum was proud of me anyway. She thought I was a child genius. But there was also a sense that I had reached my academic ceiling. If you come from a background where even a single "O" level was an achievement, then I guess talk of doing a degree was strictly off limits.

So there I was studying for my "A" levels. But while most if not all my classmates were deciding which university or polytechnic to apply for (then they were different institutions), I was lining up job interviews to work in a bank. Occasionally, during lessons my mates would be filling in application forms for various academic institutions. Initially I was quite relieved at not having to go through such a chore. However, the more they talked about what degree they hoped to take and whereabouts in the country they hoped to study, the less appealing working as a bank clerk in Chorlton-cum-Hardy seemed.

At the time polytechnics had a more vocational edge to their degrees and some people, although not everyone, chose to apply to one if they weren't confident that they would get sufficiently high grades to go to university. One day I had an epiphany (which, in case you're wondering,

isn't some medical condition). What was to stop me exploring the possibility of going to a polytechnic, even if I did have a job lined up in a bank?

I got quite excited at the idea. Suddenly the thought of continuing my studies, if I could find the right course, grew rather appealing. I decided to check it out with a teacher.

It's been nearly 30 years since the following conversation took place, but I remember it like it was yesterday. Here's how it went.

"Sir, have you got a minute?"

Mr Wakefield (to save his embarrassment, that's not his real name) looked briefly at his watch and then at me. "Yes, what is it McGee?" (None of the male teachers called us by our first names.)

"Sir, I was just wondering," I said in a slightly hesitant manner. "I realize I'm not good enough to go to university …"

"Yes," interrupted Mr Wakefield in a "that's-kind-of-obvious-don't-you-think" tone of voice.

"But do you think I should apply to go to polytechnic?"

"Haven't you got a job lined up in the bank?"

"Oh yes, sir. I start in July, once I've finished my 'A' levels. I just thought it might be good to have a plan B."

Mr Wakefield was clearly in a hurry and I sensed he hadn't expected to be having such a conversation with me. He seemed distracted and slightly caught off guard.

"Well McGee, if I was you I'd stick with the bank. Now, was there anything else?" As if sensing my disappointment from my lack of response, he added, "To be honest,

McGee, who knows what the job market will be like in the next three years. The bank's your best option."

I shrugged and said, "Fine, I realize it was a crazy idea, I just thought …"

Our conversation was over in less than 30 seconds. It influenced the next 12 months of my life.

As I walked away from Mr Wakefield, the small flame of my academic aspirations flickered out. I didn't question his opinion, because I trusted him. What had I been thinking? I'd just been deluding myself. Time to prepare for my life in the bank and leave polytechnics and universities to the really bright kids in my class.

I hated the bank. Within two weeks of joining I was going for job interviews in my lunch hour.

Four weeks later I got my "A" level results. They were better than expected. They were good enough to get into polytechnic. In fact, they were good enough to go to university.

The power of words, hey? The Book of Proverbs says they have the power to bring life or death. Mr Wakefield's words weren't fatal, but they did have a significant impact.



- Think about a teacher who inspired or encouraged you. What was their name?
- How did they help you?
- Think about a teacher who had a negative impact on you. What was it that they said or did that caused this impact?
- How did that affect you at the time? What have been the long-term ramifications?

Many of the personal issues you face today stem from your experiences in the past, whether they were due to an over-protective parent or a thoughtless teacher. Sometimes an event can lead to some major long-term damage, but thankfully the effect's often minor, as the next story illustrates.



Helen rarely makes pastry these days. That stems from a cookery class at school. Helen and her classmates were making pastry. Her friend Debbie asked the teacher for feedback as she rubbed the butter into the flour. The teacher was impressed.

Helen sought similar reassurance. Looking at her efforts, the teacher gathered the rest of the class around the two girls. Turning to Debbie's pastry she said, "Here's how it should look girls." Then of Helen's pastry she added, "and here's how it *shouldn't* look."

It was a humiliating experience for a relatively shy teenage girl. Even though Helen is a fairly confident person in other areas, it took her a long time to gain any self-confidence in pastry making.

Teachers do an incredibly challenging and difficult job and they get blamed for a lot. My goal isn't to add to that blame, but simply to raise awareness that how they behave can have a profound long-term effect on young people, both positively and negatively – even if it's only in relation to pastry making.

However, it's not just teachers or parents who influence your beliefs and affect your confidence. Let's look at another key influence.

How the Media can Influence Your Self-Confidence

Hitler knew it, so did Churchill, so did Sir Bob Geldof.

Companies now spend millions of pounds on it.

Quite simply, if you want to change, shape and influence people's minds, then the media can be your most powerful weapon.

You see, the media doesn't merely transmit information. The media shapes our culture. It reinforces stereotypes. It subtly influences our views of what is acceptable and good and what is unacceptable and bad.

The media is powerful. It can arouse and awaken the conscience of a nation. It can also distort the truth and deceive people in doing so.

The media can also influence the beliefs you hold about yourself. And not all those beliefs are as empowering as they might first appear.

"I must be slim."
"I must be popular."
"I must have the latest fashion accessory."
"I must be cool, and be seen to be cool."

I guess all the above seem fine when you're slim, popular, wear the latest fashions and people think you're cool. But what if you're not?

What if your weight is an issue? What if your body shape is not OK in your culture, even though it may be in others?

What if you're not so popular?

What if you can't afford to keep up with the latest fashions?

What if you're obsessed with what other people think about you?

You see, on a deserted desert island you might feel OK about yourself. But you're not on that island.

So now there's a nagging sense of insecurity based on comparing yourself with other people. Now there's a sense of feeling inadequate because of what some parts of the media purport is OK and acceptable in terms of how you should look and behave.

Subtly and gradually

the media can chip away at your confidence.

There's another way in which the media influences you – bad news can arouse, titillate and undermine your confidence.

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997 was tragic news – but in the short term it proved to be good news for the media. There were record sales of newspapers in the UK in the aftermath of her death. Quite simply, bad news sells. That's true the whole world over.

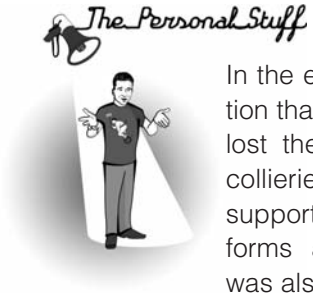
And let's be honest, what arouses your interest more? Hearing about a friend who's been happily married for the last 20 years, or discovering that they've been having an affair and their partner has just found out? The former might please you, but the latter arouses your intrigue and curiosity far, far more.

Therefore the media can argue, perhaps quite rightly, that they only publish or televise what people want to read or hear about. Ultimately they're competing for our attention and to do so they have to shout loudly. Sometimes that means sensationalizing and exaggerating the real facts in order to be heard.

However, the purpose of this discussion is not to examine the ethics of the media. What is under scrutiny is how the media can, in some cases, erode your self-confidence by distorting your view of reality. Let me explain.

Imagine that you find yourself out of work. So much of your self-worth and esteem can be wrapped up in your job, and now you don't have one. How are you feeling?

With that in mind, you might find the next story particularly interesting.



In the early 1990s I worked with an organization that was set up to help coal miners who'd lost their jobs due to the closures of their collieries. My role was to offer advice and support in writing CVs, completing application forms and preparing for job interviews. I was also there to provide some psychological support and encouragement.

For the majority of the men, working in the mining industry was the only job they'd had since leaving school. Some were quite positive about their future and saw this as a new beginning. But for some their confidence was shattered. Their expectations of finding work were minimal. Their sense of pride and self-respect had been left behind in the now redundant coal mines.

My goal was to offer some hope and to help them gradually rebuild their fragile confidence and self-esteem.

"But there's no bloody jobs." That was a phrase I heard over and over and over again.

The economy at the time was certainly not booming, but the pessimistic outlook of some of the miners was fed and reinforced by the media. Bad news doesn't only sell, it can also influence a person's outlook and self-belief.

My aim was to show them that the picture of the world their local press painted was not in fact the whole story. I didn't have to look far to prove my point.

A supermarket chain was looking to build a distribution centre, and in doing so would create 800 new jobs. The company was looking at two sites. Site A was close to a

former colliery in the North West of England and ex-miners would be given priority for jobs. Site B was also in the North West of England, less than 20 miles away from Site A. The supermarket eventually chose Site A as the most suitable location for its distribution centre. Good news for the people seeking work who lived in the area, but bad news for those people hoping to see the centre located at Site B.

So how did the local press cover the story? The paper that published in the area closest to Site A (where the distribution centre was to be built) led with a front-page story of how a Christmas tree had been set ablaze in a pub. The pub was evacuated. Nobody died. Nobody was injured. Also on the front page was a small piece about how a 71-year-old pensioner had ended up in hospital after she dropped a frozen turkey on her foot. (Clearly the readers of this paper love their diet of cutting-edge news.) Fortunately her foot wasn't broken. (That must have been a relief to the readers.)

And the piece about the creation of 800 new jobs? That was on page three. Even then it wasn't the main story on the page. Although politicians can be accused of wanting to bury bad news, it seems the media can be equally guilty of burying good news.

So what about the people buying the local paper that published close to Site B? (That's the site that hadn't been chosen for the distribution centre.) Where did they read about the same story? Page three?

Are you kidding? You've probably guessed.

The news that the supermarket distribution centre wasn't to be located in their area was front-page news. I've still got a copy of the respective papers. The headline read:

800 jobs lost

It went on to say that hopes of a jobs bonanza had been crushed (interesting word to use, don't you think?) with the decision that the distribution centre wasn't to be built in their area.

Bad news sells.

But it also distorts our picture of reality.

When you're looking for work and your confidence is low, it's perhaps understandable that your sense of hope and optimism is further diminished when you switch on the news, turn on the radio, log onto the internet or pick up the paper. I wonder, is it time to change your media diet?



- How much news do you consume in a day?
- On reflection, how does it affect your mood and morale?
- When was the last time you watched or read anything that inspired you? What was it?

How You can Undermine Your Own Confidence

So far we've seen how a combination of factors can erode and perhaps ultimately crush your confidence. Parents can, so too can teachers, and even the media can play its part.

Let me say again: my goal in exploring these factors has not been to play the blame game, but to gain some

understanding of why you might lack confidence in certain areas of your life.

Now onto our final factor that can contribute to the undermining of your confidence – yourself.

A question I often ask my audiences is, "Who is the most important person you will ever talk to?"

The answer?

Yourself.

The conversations you have with yourself, your internal self-talk, can have a significant impact on how you feel and behave. Put quite simply, your internal self-talk can either reinforce your negative beliefs or help replace them with more positive, empowering ones.

In my book *S.U.M.O. (Shut Up, Move On)*, I explored the T.E.A.R. process. It's worth revisiting briefly here:

T – Thinking (your internal dialogue, your self-talk, your thoughts).
↓
E – Emotions (your feelings, which are influenced by what you're thinking about).
↓
A – Actions (your behaviour, the things you do or don't do).
↓
R – Results (the outcomes of your actions).

The T.E.A.R. process is based on cognitive behavioural therapy or CBT, and it aims to illustrate the importance and impact of your thinking. (Psychotherapist Aaron Beck helped develop CBT and believes that the way in which you think about a situation affects how you act. In turn, your actions can affect how you think and feel.)

When people talk about confidence, they typically associate it with "feelings" (or emotions). They often say either:

"I feel very confident."

or

"I don't feel very confident."

They rarely say:

"I'm thinking in a confident way."

or

"My thinking is leading me to feel less confident."

However, despite the language you may use, those feelings of confidence or lack of confidence are strongly associated with your thinking, or your internal self-talk.

In Chapter 6, "How to be your own best mate", we explore how to make your thinking work for you. However, at this point it's important for you to recognize that the conversations you have with yourself can potentially undermine your self-confidence.

What do you say when you talk to yourself?

Can you relate to any of the following phrases?

"I'm hopeless at ..."
"I'll never be any good at ..."
"I absolutely hate having to ..."
"I'm always forgetting to ..."

All these statements are ways in which you articulate the beliefs you have about yourself.

To be honest, it would be surprising if you haven't ever said any of the above. So if that's the case, am I suggesting that the whole world is going around undermining their own self-confidence?

No.

The issue is not whether you have ever said these phrases to yourself, but more importantly, *how often* you say them, and how much you *believe* them. You see, when you hear something often enough (even if it's said purely through habit), you start to believe it.

If you think negatively about yourself and your potential, it will gradually begin to affect how you're feeling and slowly erode or undermine your confidence.

Interestingly, although the above may seem fairly obvious, few of us are aware of how critical our thinking actually is. In fact, rarely do we take time out to think about how we think.

If I were to ask you which side of your mouth you tend to chew your food on, most people would have to take a moment to think about their answer.

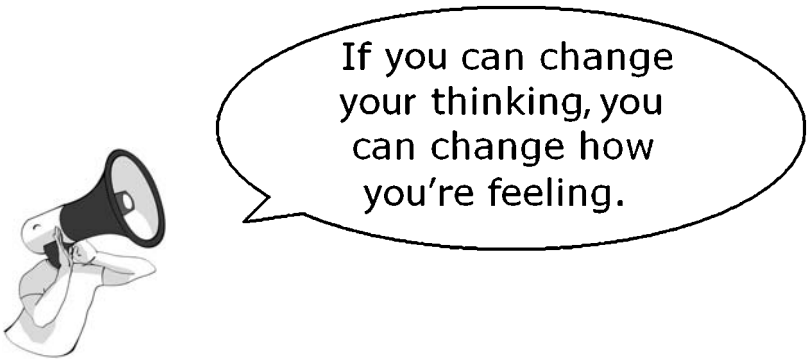
Why? After all, you do it all the time.

The reason?

Because you do it without consciously thinking about it. You eat without thinking about how you're eating.

The same goes for your thinking. You're often not consciously aware of how your thinking is affecting your feelings – or the fact that you can change and take control of your thoughts.

The truth is ...





Pit Stop

- What are some of the negative phrases you say to yourself?
- How often do you say them? Daily? Weekly? Or rarely?
- On a scale of 1–10, how much do you actually believe them?



My wife Helen and I recently met Claire at a friend's party. I had known her at university but hadn't seen her in over 20 years.

Let me tell you a little about Claire. She's physically very attractive. She has a relatively outgoing personality and is easy to get on with. She's in good shape and enjoys running. When you're at a party full of strangers she would seem like the ideal person to hang out with (and that's not just my perspective – Helen would think the same).

Except for one thing.

Claire has a rather irritating habit.

She constantly puts herself down.

A certain degree of self-deprecation, particularly when dished out with a large dose of humour, can be quite endearing. But if Claire was an Italian meal then the only dish available would be spaghetti. It's certainly nice as part of a main course, but it loses all its appeal when nothing else accompanies it.

I soon felt bloated from her negativity. It was a habit I first noticed when Claire and I were students, but I thought after 20 years she'd have grown out of it. I was wrong.

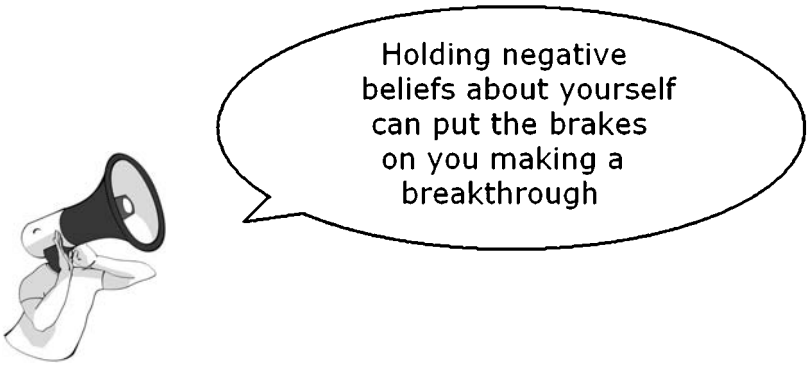
"I'm a person with a great future behind me," she remarked. An amusing comment if taken as a one-off, but further comments followed. Her comments seemed born out of a belief about herself that could be summed up as follows: "I'm not an OK person."

Her burden of insecurity seemed heavy on her shoulders. She seemed unhappy.

She talked about her career as a teacher and how she felt she'd not reached her potential. I wanted to agree with her. I wanted to say that the reason she hadn't reached her potential was not down to a lack of ability or opportunity, but due to a lack of self-belief and confidence.

I've no idea why Claire felt this way about herself but I do know that whatever the cause, Claire had bought into a lie and was continuing to maintain it.

The truth is ...





- Who do you know who reminds you of Claire?
- Can you relate to her at all?
- What's the one negative belief about yourself that you've bought into and are helping to maintain?



∞ People develop confidence over time. This comes through life experiences and through the support, advice and encouragement of others.

∞ Our experiences at school, particularly our interactions with teachers and classmates, can have a profound long-term effect on us.

∞ The media can quite subtly affect how we see ourselves. It can influence our view of what is "normal" and distort our view of reality.

∞ We can be our own worst enemy by reinforcing negative self-beliefs by the thoughts we have about ourselves.

Understanding the reasons for our lack of confidence places us in a better position to do something about it. It's not fate that's given us low self-confidence, there are causes. And revealing what those causes were places us in a position to move forward and discover some solutions.

Now it's time for a change of focus. The rest of this book is dedicated to showing you how to rebuild and strengthen your confidence in order to fulfill your potential and to make the most of life. And if your confidence takes a knock, you'll discover how to prevent that becoming a permanent blow.

So let's move on from why confidence is such a big deal and who might have crushed it, to learning how a small change – maybe as little as 10 percent – can make a big difference.



SECTION TWO

The Stuff that Will Really Help

5 You'll Get By with a Little Help from Your Friends



You're about to discover

Why your ability to succeed is inextricably linked to the support you get from others.

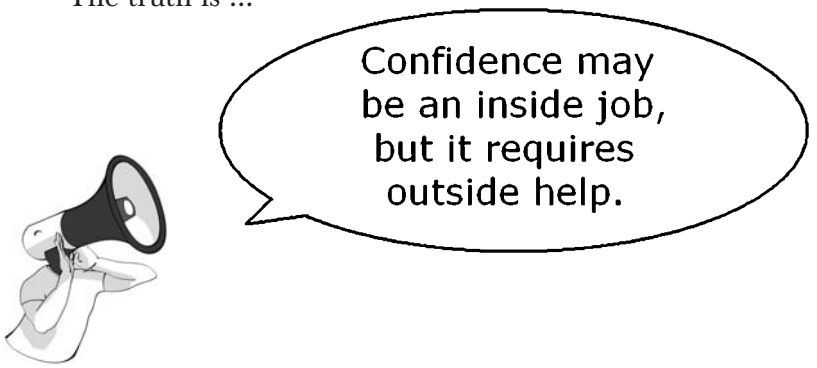
The four roles people play to help you grow in confidence and achieve your potential.

The pitfalls and dangers when you have unbalanced support from people.

How to get help from people you don't know and will never meet.

The Beatles had a hit song in 1967 called "With a Little Help from My Friends." They probably didn't realize it at the time, but they were promoting a truth that can have a major impact on our levels of health, happiness and self-confidence.

The truth is ...



Battling through life believing that you and you alone are wholly responsible for your success is, to put it bluntly, a lie.

Perhaps you're thinking that asking for help from others is a sign of weakness.

It isn't.

It's a reality.

And yes, there's much you can do to help yourself increase your self-confidence, but ultimately the journey is easier and probably quicker when you enlist the help of others.

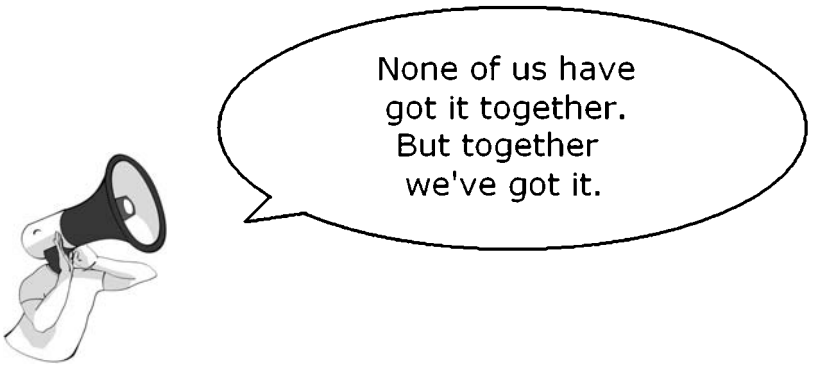
Desperately Dependent?

As humans, we are one of the most needy and vulnerable of the animal species when we're born. We are totally dependent on the care, protection and provision of others. No support equals no survival. I'm not suggesting that other animals don't require caring for when they're born, but the level of care required and the length of time it's required for is usually far less than for the human species.

However, as we develop we increasingly like our independence and freedom. And that's not without its challenges. The cause of much of the conflict in families comes when a teenager seeks to assert their independence and break free from their parents' influence, while still being dependent on them (at least in most cases) for food, shelter and quite often money!

So yes, we need freedom to grow – but freedom does not equate to going it alone. Just as learning to ride a bike usually requires stabilizers until we gain our balance, so people need stabilizers or supporters to help them master life's challenges.

The truth is ...



Where does Your Support Come from?

The rower Steven Redgrave won five gold medals over five consecutive Olympic Games. It's a remarkable achievement. I guess when it came to rowing during that period, Steve was very confident of achieving success.

He's crossed the line first on five separate occasions, but here's my question.

How many times was he alone in the boat when he crossed the line?

The answer?

Never.

On every single occasion Redgrave was in the boat with at least one other person. His success, however remarkable, was not achieved solely through his own strength, skill and expertise, but with the support of others. And there were plenty of other people who never stepped inside that boat who also contributed significantly to his success.

Redgrave was confident of success not just because of his own ability but also because of the support of others. Put quite simply: without them, there would be no gold medals.

So who helps you achieve success? Who helps you increase your levels of self-confidence?

Interestingly, the type of people who may be responsible for crushing or eroding your confidence could equally be the people who help nurture and grow it:

Parents
Other family members
Teachers
Friends at school
Bosses

In reflecting on the kind of help we need from people in order to boost our confidence and our ability to succeed in life, I identified four roles people play (it's possible, although unlikely, that one person may play all four). Here are the names I've given to each one: Cheerleader, Challenger, Coach and Confidant. Let's explore how each of these provides unique support.

The Cheerleader

These are the people who seek to encourage you. They're the people who when they introduce you to others at a social gathering don't just use your name, but are likely to "big you up" as they do so. They believe in you and your abilities to succeed. When you're feeling down, a Cheerleader's intention is not so much to empathize with your situation but to help pick you up. They offer hope.

Going back to the T.E.A.R. (Thinking, Emotions, Actions, Results) process, they can help influence your Thinking

about yourself and your situation in such a way that Emotionally you feel more positive and confident. A Cheerleader might not be able to advise you on the Actions you need to take to get the Results you want, but they can help you to believe enough in yourself to explore what actions are required.

The upside of a Cheerleader

- They're great encouragers.
- They can generate optimism within you about the future.
- They can be a great antidote when you're feeling low.
- They remind you of your successes.

The downside of a Cheerleader

- They may encourage an unrealistically high view of yourself and your capabilities. This could lead to self-delusion and not self-development.
- They may lack the necessary insight and experience to provide real support in a situation.
- They're unlikely to allow you sufficient downtime when you've experienced a setback and could feel uncomfortable around you when you're angry or upset.
- They can generate the necessary enthusiasm for a task, but lack the knowledge to help you accomplish it.

Cheerleaders can help you believe it's possible to climb the mountain, but they can't provide you with the equipment to get to the summit.

In conversation with a Cheerleader

You: "Well, I've had some bad news. Looks like they'll be laying off people at work. It's going to be a struggle finding anything at the moment."

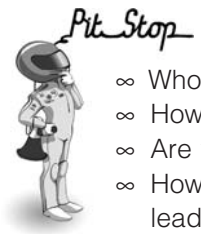
Cheerleader: "But Paul, you've got an amazingly wide range of skills. Most employers would be thrilled to have you working for them."

You: "I'm not so sure. I've been with this company for ten years. I'm dreading having to go for interviews."

Cheerleader: "Look Paul, I think you're underestimating your worth. You've achieved loads in this job – another employer is bound to spot that."

You: "But what about the interviews?"

Cheerleader: "Relax. You're getting this out of perspective. They're not as bad as you think. I've got total confidence in you mate. You'll be fine."



- Who are the Cheerleaders in your life?
- How do they help you?
- Are you a cheerleader to anyone?
- How can you consciously be more of a Cheerleader to other people?

The Challenger

These are the people who question your motives, plans and dreams. Their goal is not to discourage you, but to help you explore in more depth what you're actually trying to achieve and what the benefit will be when you do so. They raise questions you've never considered. They can take your thinking to a new level.

The upside of a Challenger

- They help you realize that success is not just because of positive energy but that there's also a need for a thought-through strategy.
- They can help direct and focus your enthusiasm as well as question its validity and sustainability.
- They can both widen your thinking to explore new possibilities and narrow your thinking to achieve your goal.
- If your progress is slow they're unlikely simply to encourage you to press on, but to ask for reasons for the delay in your progress.

The downside of a Challenger

- Their seeming lack of positive enthusiasm towards you may at times appear as if their motives are questionable. The question may arise, "Are they trying to help me or to bring me down?"
- They may challenge you when emotionally you're not in a good place to be challenged, particularly after a setback.
- They may not provide the necessary encouragement when required.

∞ Occasionally their questioning, especially around considering other possibilities, may actually bring confusion and not clarity.

Challengers can help you understand more fully how big the mountain is and that there are several ways to reach the top, but crucially they might not be able to show you *how* to climb it.

In conversation with a Challenger

You: "Well, I've completed my sales proposal. I'm fairly confident we'll get the business."

Challenger: "How have you gone about it?"

You: "I've just used the usual format. It's always worked before."

Challenger: "Fine. But why are you so confident it will work on this occasion? Have you gone through it with anyone?"

You: "Well, not yet, no. But I've done dozens of proposals in the past."

Challenger: "I'm not suggesting you haven't. This might be exactly what your client was looking for, but just to be on the safe side would it help if I had a look over it?"

You: "Yeah that would be great. Thanks."

Challenger: "Let's start with the attitude that however good it is, there's probably going to be a way to improve it. Agreed?"

You: "I guess so."



- Who are the Challengers in your life? (If you can't think of any, would it be useful to give certain people permission to challenge you when appropriate?)
- Identify one person who you could be more of a support to by being their Challenger.

The Coach

These people could be a combination of Cheerleader and Challenger. Their focus above all tends to be on the "A" in the T.E.A.R. process: the Actions.

The Coach won't just challenge your thinking but help you to explore what tools you need in order to accomplish your goal. They will help you to look to your own internal resources and also examine the external opportunities available to you. The Coach will help you be clear and specific in the actions to take and hold you accountable as to when they're carried out. They may well be a resource expert for you themselves, or they will point you in the direction of where you will find them.

The upside of a Coach

- You will probably have a more formal relationship with a Coach (many people pay for their services), which puts things on a more professional footing. Therefore there's an expectation that they will provide more structure and focus to your conversations as well as an increased expectation regarding their input.

- They are more likely to challenge you than a well-meaning friend would do.
- As a follow-up or review is usually built into the relationship, they're also more able to hold you accountable regarding your progress (or lack of it).
- Confidence can come from them being a sounding board and because you have explored your issues with them.
- Their detached perspective can provide a clarity that is not clouded by emotional involvement.

The downside of a Coach

- The role requires a range of skills that you're unlikely to find in a well-meaning friend. Therefore the relationship is more likely, although not necessarily, based on a professional fee paying basis (unless your organization provides you with a Coach). Cost may also play a part in how long the Coaching lasts.
- Because they're unlikely to be a friend the Coach can offer a detached perspective on your situation, although this detachment could also be viewed as uncaring.
- Your interaction is likely to be built on an agreement between two parties and not out of a friendship and that itself can obviously influence the dynamics of your relationship.

A Coach will help you find a way up the mountain. They may even accompany you on the journey. The Coach will show you the tools to use and how to use them, but they might not necessarily provide you with the motivation or the inspiration to make the climb.

In conversation with a Coach

You: "I'm really struggling with keeping to my New Year resolutions. By the end of the first week of January I'm already beginning to feel a failure."

Coach: "Why do you think that is?"

You: "Well, I start off all enthusiastic but then I get a setback or something happens at work and before I know it I'm back to square one."

Coach: "And because of that you feel a failure?"

You: "Yeah."

Coach: "OK, let's see what we can do to improve this situation and achieve some success. That is something you want to do, isn't it?"

You: "Absolutely."

Coach: "Good. Well, out of all your New Year resolutions, which one is perhaps the most important to you right now?"

You: "Losing weight, definitely."

Coach: "So how about we look at that one for the moment and put all the others to one side?"

You: "Sounds good to me."

Coach: "OK. Let's start by finding out your current weight and then look at what your overall goal is. Then we can look at ways to help you achieve this goal."



- Do you have a Coach? (Don't get too hung up by the title. My daughter gets dance and singing lessons. The people who support her are called teachers and she gets support on both a group and a one-to-one basis.)
- If you had to identify one specific area of your life where a Coach could help you, what would it be?
- What would be the benefits to you if you could develop and improve in that specific area?

The Confidant

These are the people you trust. Their support comes not because of their ability but because of their integrity. A Confidant listens. They are not there to advise you, but to provide you with emotional support. Their encouragement comes from their willingness to offer empathy and understanding. They may challenge you occasionally and may at times be your Cheerleader, but that is not their primary role.

The upside of a Confidant

- They are the people to whom you can offload. They're easy to have as friends and supporters because you can simply talk to them. You don't have to answer their questions about your plans and motives. That is not their role.

- When you're feeling down they can provide perspective, not through their answers but because they give you an opportunity to express and articulate your frustrations and concerns. And as you do so, invariably you're able to become calmer and clearer about your situation.
- A Confidant above all gives you time and space, and this in itself can provide perspective and renew your confidence and sense of optimism.

The downside of a Confidant

- When you're looking for advice or a strategy for how to deal with an issue, the Confidant is not the person for you. Their support is invaluable, but they cannot necessarily provide the direction to help you move forward.
- It is possible that having confided in them you may still feel frustration at your lack of progress or ability to know what your next step will be.

You can share your dream about climbing the mountain, you can even talk at great length about your failed attempts to climb it so far, but a Confidant's role is not to provide you with the motivation, tools or strategy to help you fulfill your dream.

In conversation with a Confidant

You: "I've had a nightmare at work today."

Confidant: "In what way?"

You: "Oh it's Kathy, my boss. She's always picking on me."

Confidant: "How do you mean?"

You: "Well, you name it she does it."

Confidant: "Does she pick on anyone else?"

You: "Actually she tends to pick on everyone at the moment."

Confidant: "If she's anything like me, it sounds like she's either hormonal or under a lot of pressure!"

You: "It's probably both. To be fair, she is under a lot of pressure at the moment – there are quite a few people off work. To be honest, she's not like that with me all the time. She can be quite human sometimes!"

Confidant: "But if you did have an issue with her, could you talk to her?"

You: "Oh yeah. Absolutely. Actually I don't know what I'm moaning about really. I'm more than capable of dealing with it when I think about it."

Confidant: "Well, you know I'm always here if you want to talk anything through."



- Who's your Confidant? In what specific ways do they help you?
- Who are you a Confidant to?
- Consider the skills required to be a Confidant. What would be your challenge in seeking to be one for someone else?

A Summary of the Roles

We all need help from others if we're going to grow in confidence. A word of advice, some encouragement, a listening ear or the challenge to aim higher could all make a big difference to our confidence in different situations. Here is a summary of the four roles and the upside and potential downside of their involvement in supporting us.

Cheerleader	Challenger
Upside	**Upside**
Great encourager	Questions your motives from a positive perspective
"Bigs you up"	Helps you explore things in more depth
Believes in you	Raises questions you might not have considered
Picks you up from a setback	Helps take your thinking to a new level
Optimistic about your future	Helps you discover a strategy
Reminds you of your successes	

Cheerleader	Challenger
Downside	**Downside**
May encourage an unrealistically high view of yourself	Their motives may be questioned at times
May lack the insight or skills to help you	May challenge you at a time when emotionally you're not ready to be
May trivialise your setbacks	May not always provide the necessary encouragement
	Their questioning could bring confusion, not clarity, at times.
Coach	**Confidant**
Upside	**Upside**
Helps you explore the tools you require to achieve your goal	You trust these people
Helps you identify internal and external resources to help you achieve your goal	A great listener to whom you can offload
Could be a resource for you	Helps provide perspective through their calm approach
Can prove to be an excellent sounding board and able to provide an objective perspective	Gives you time and space to talk through your issues
	Doesn't provide answers but can help you to discover your own
Downside	**Downside**
You're unlikely to find all these skills in a friend	Usually unable to provide advice or a strategy
You may need to pay for their expertise	You may be frustrated with their inability to provide you with any answers
Their detached perspective could be viewed as uncaring	Sometimes it's not empathy that you need but a kick up the backside to go out and do something
The potential cost of their support may prove prohibitive	

The Beatles were Right

In the chorus of their hit song "Help!", The Beatles sing about how they need somebody – but not just anybody.

In order to develop your self-confidence you may need someone's help, but be careful who that person is. For instance:

- When you need a reality check, a Cheerleader won't be the most helpful person.
- When you're particularly lacking in confidence, a Challenger may make the situation worse.
- When you need a strategy, don't look to a Confidant.
- Rarely will you find a person within your circle of friends who has the skills of a Coach.

Different Roles for Different Folks

It's important to understand that people can play different roles

to different people

in different situations.

For example, to some people you may be a Cheerleader, but to others you may be a Challenger. Within my role as a Coach I can find myself also playing the role of Cheerleader or Challenger, depending on the person I'm

coaching and their current level of confidence and competence (I'm much more likely to be a Cheerleader to someone lacking in confidence and ability than to someone who is already very confident and competent: one needs encouragement, the other needs the challenge to become even better).

The key is to realize that you can play different roles for people and likewise they can do the same for you.

The danger comes when we lack other people's support or when we have the input of only one of those roles.

For instance, a child whose parents constantly play the role of Challenger will over time see their confidence eroded. While their performance in a particular task may increase, their levels of self-confidence and self-acceptance may decrease. In this situation the child's confidence may be inextricably linked to their performance or competence and not to their intrinsic worth as a human being.

That's bad news.

Agree?

Likewise, arrogance and complacency can flourish when a person surrounds themselves with Cheerleaders and fails to have anyone in their world who acts as a Challenger.

Again, that's bad news for all concerned.





Part of my self-confidence stems from the support and encouragement of my mum. Although she's played many roles in my life and would admit she hasn't always got it right, she has undoubtedly been my Cheerleader. She gets excited at any success I achieve, no matter how small, and has no hesitation in letting her friends know about my achievements. She can also be a Confidant, but unless she's teaching me how to make her legendary mince pies, she's definitely not my Coach.

But I also need my Challengers – in fact, I actively seek them out for certain projects. While writing *S.U.M.O. (Shut Up, Move On),* I would send each completed chapter to four people for their input, ideas and feedback. They had permission to challenge and pull apart my work. In order to have the confidence that I'd written a good book, I needed them to challenge both my content and style. Four people telling me how wonderful my writing was would not have been particularly helpful. Having said that, occasional praise was always appreciated – they weren't banned from ever being my Cheerleader – it just wasn't their primary role.

I didn't always agree with all their feedback, but allowing myself and my work to be challenged helped increase my confidence and belief in what I'd written. I've gone through exactly the same process with this book and it's helped immensely (however, you will be the judge of whether my confidence in what I've written is misplaced or not).

Some would argue that you have to be relatively self-confident to allow someone to be your challenger and that a sign that people lack self-confidence is when they're unwilling to be challenged. Do you know anyone like that?

My friend Paul is unique because he has the ability to play all four roles in terms of how he relates to me. He's a Cheerleader for who I am as a person, but he's very much a Challenger of my work. Our relationship, though, has been forged over 20 years and in some respects he's earned the right to be my Challenger. I know his heart. I know his intentions.

I believe that the quality of my work is better and has more depth because of Paul's insights, comments and questions – and I'm more confident in what I do as a result.

Mind you, there are some people who want to play the Challenger in my life but without my permission! Maybe you've had a similar experience.

Having conducted a seminar in London, one woman wrote on the evaluation form "10 things I hated about today's trainer." My confidence felt crushed and I turned to Paul for his support. Sensing my anguish as I read out what she wrote, he replied, "I'm surprised she only spotted ten!"

Having used humour to defuse the situation, he then played the role of Confidant and allowed me to talk. His final comment still sticks with me, "Sometimes what people say is not so much about you, it's more a reflection of what's going on in their world at the time."

Paul does have his limitations in terms of what he can do to help me. Likewise, you'll need more than one person to help you grow and develop in your competence and confidence.

In the last few months there's another person who has become a huge support to Helen and me: Humphrey, our business Coach.

I started off my business as a one-man band. Then Helen joined me. But things have changed. The business has grown. We've taken on staff and associates and the launch of SUMO4Schools has been both exciting and challenging.

Helen and I have many skills, but we both lack some of the necessary skills and expertise to drive the business forward. Left to our own devices I'm fairly confident that our business would have continued to plod along steadily, but not achieve anything like its potential. That's how it can be for anyone when we lack the support we need in particular areas.

Can you relate to that at all?

We needed help. We needed somebody to hold our hand, give us a map and help us climb our mountain.

My friend Andy Bounds mentioned that the best financial business investment he had ever made came when he hired his business coach, Humphrey. We had our answer. Or to put it more bluntly, we had our Humphrey.

I'm now confident about the growth and success of our business because we have the support of someone with the competence and expertise that we lack.

Maybe that's what you need as well. Someone to take you to the next level. Someone who's strong where you're weak.

Just make sure that you have the right people to fulfil the four roles.



- Out of the four roles of Cheerleader, Challenger, Coach and Confidant, which, if any, are you lacking input from?
- Are you surrounding yourself with people who all play a similar role? If so, what are the consequences?
- Could any of them play another role?
- How would that benefit you if they did?

Widening Your Circle of Friends

We've explored the roles people may play in our lives that ultimately can help us grow in confidence, but sometimes our "friend" might not come in the form of a person we actually know. I realize that might sound strange, so let me explain.

We can all learn lessons from people we've never met. Our inspiration can come from reading their book, or watching their DVD or listening to them on CD.

I read a lot. I listen to CDs when I'm driving. I gain ideas, insights and inspiration from people I've never met and in some cases am unlikely ever to meet (the fact that some of them are now dead settles the issue, I guess).

But I get by with a little help from my friends. And I'm not limiting those friends to being living, walking, talking human beings. To do so would be to limit the scope of input that people can have to my life.

Pit Stop



- Who inspires you although you've never met them?
- Have you read, watched or listened to anything inspirational recently?
- If not, isn't it about time you did so?
- Go on then – do something about it.

The Personal Stuff



This is Sarah's story:

When I was made redundant, it's fair to say there were some dark moments and challenging times. I drew strength from family and friends, but I also drew confidence from a poem that I had on my wall.

The poem goes by two titles: "Thinking" and the more commonly used "The man who thinks he can." Here it is:

If you think you are beaten you are.
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you'd like to win but think you can't,
It's almost certain you won't.

If you think you will lose, you've lost.
For out of the world you'll find,
Success begins with a fellow's will,
It's all in the state of the mind.

If you think you're outclassed you are.
You've got to think high to rise.

You've got to be sure of yourself
Before you can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man.
But soon or late, the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.

Walter D. Wintle

The poem reminded me of the importance of self-belief and having a positive attitude to life. In a small yet significant way it helped boost my confidence – I hope it does the same for you too.



So you'll get by with a little help from your friends. In fact, you might not just get by – your friends can help you soar. Let's appreciate and value the roles others play in helping us and lets also be prepared to become that role for others who need to boost their own confidence.

The truth is that we all need Cheerleaders, Challengers, Coaches and Confidants at times. Remember, the key to success and increased confidence is not independence – doing it all on your own – but interdependence – doing it with the help of others. That small change in thinking could make a big difference to what you're able to achieve in life.

6 How to Be Your Own Best Mate



You're about to discover

Six ideas on how to avoid sabotaging your confidence.

Why it's important to accept that "flaws are us".

The need to go easy on the boxing glove.

How to perform plastic surgery on your mind.

Why you should quit waiting to feel confident.

Why it's good to weigh up but not to be weighed down by criticism.

Having explored how other people can have a positive impact on your levels of confidence, let's turn the spotlight onto you and discover how you can become your own best mate. To do so means taking charge of how you think about your own strengths and weaknesses.

Here are some great insights and ideas to help you do just that.

Six 10 Percent Tips to Avoid Sabotaging Your Confidence

1 Accept that "flaws are us"

Your background, upbringing, culture, media and education can all communicate a message that on one level seems both noble and desirable: "Be good. Do the best you can. Aim to improve."

That seems fine, and I endorse those statements. But along with them, perhaps unspoken or included in the small print, are the following messages: "You're not good enough, do more, you're not as good as ..."

It seems like a two-edged sword. For some people their desire for self-improvement is born out of a sense of inadequacy and a belief that they're not OK. Sometimes we can be left feeling that no matter what we do or what we achieve, we'll never quite arrive.

Can you relate to that at all?

Perhaps that's what lies at the heart of a capitalist society. A need to create a need. And how can the need be met and the gap filled unless people become aware of it?

So, in an effort to meet this need and fill the gap, some people embark on a never-ending search to find a quick fix or a magic wand answer to their problems. They listen to the latest guru, who they place on a pedestal marked "hope". They buy their books, they attend their seminars, they listen to their CDs.

And they feel good.

Sometimes they feel very good.

And then slowly

over time

the good feelings

fade and

fade

until

a new fix

a new cure is presented to them.

And so the cycle continues and we all play the never-ending game called "How to feel good about yourself" while at the same time being bombarded with reasons on why we shouldn't.

And do you know what?

Deep down we know we will never win the game because no matter how hard we try

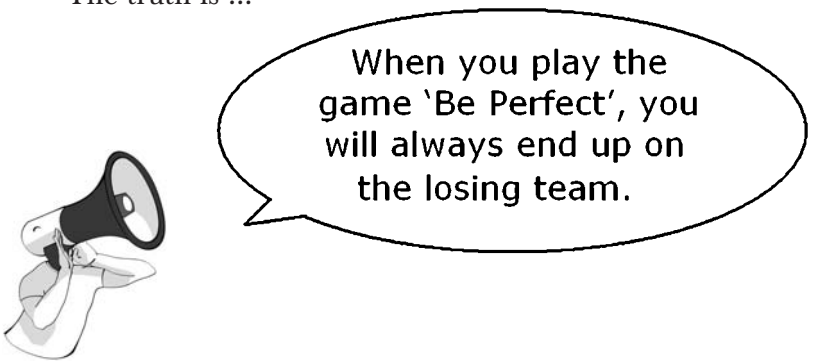
we fall short.

We may feel OK

for a time

but then something happens. And it's like we're having to start all over again.

The truth is ...



And the reason is that we've failed to admit to one simple truth. A truth that the media and many self-help books don't want us to realize.

We're flawed.

We all are.

And no matter what you do or how hard you try this fundamental fact remains.

You're not perfect.

And never will be.

And guess what?

That's OK.

It's OK not always to be OK. That doesn't mean that we don't need to improve, to work hard, to stretch ourselves. It's simply a recognition that part of what makes us human is our flaws and, accepting that as a package, we can be both flawed *and* fantastic.

Just three words: flawed and fantastic. But when we embrace and accept that description of ourselves, it can make a big difference to our self-esteem and confidence.



Pit Stop

- How often do you play the "Be Perfect" game?
- How do you feel about not being OK in some areas of your life?
- What's your main insight from seeing yourself as both flawed and fantastic?

2 Go easy on the boxing glove

In my talks I often highlight the role and impact of your inner critic. That's the voice inside your head that highlights your weaknesses and undermines your confidence. The voice may echo an angry parent, a critical teacher, a teasing classmate or a disappointed God.

As a visual illustration, I use a big red boxing glove that represents this voice and how you use it to beat yourself up.

Admittedly it might prove difficult to remove the glove permanently, but it's possible for the punches to become more like gentle taps that only take place occasionally. These "hits" can be seen as mild rebukes and reminders of when you may have fallen short, but they no longer need to be a barrage of incessant blows that can quite literally knock the confidence out of you.

At times we simply need to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. It's said that charity begins at home – maybe compassion needs to start there as well. Agree?

However, please don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that you fall hopelessly and madly in love with yourself and turn a blind eye to your faults and failings. But I am suggesting that you take a kinder and more compassionate approach to how you see yourself. And in turn, you'll probably start to take a more compassionate view of others.

That sounds like common sense I'm sure, but how exactly do you do that? How can you be more compassionate with yourself? The next tip will give you some ideas. But first ...



- What do you tend to beat yourself up about the most?
- How hard are the "punches"?
- Who do you know who needs to go easy on the boxing glove?
- Write down some ways in which you could help them.

3 Perform plastic surgery on your mind

There is tremendous power in what you say to yourself. Words can label you. They can both limit and liberate you. Either way, as we've already seen, they can have a profound long-term impact on you.

Just as people pay to have their outward appearance changed through a tummy tuck, a boob job or a face lift, you can perform your own form of plastic surgery. Your focus here is on your internal world and not your outward appearance. And you don't need to hire an expensive surgeon to do it.

Surgery often requires the cutting away of excess flesh or the injection of a substance such as botox. When performing surgery on your own mind, you're about to discover what language and phrases to "cut out" and what to inject in their place.

Words to cut out of your vocabulary when describing yourself

I've covered some of these before when I explored the negative beliefs we have about ourselves:

"I'm just a slob/lazy."
"I'll never be any good at ..."
"I'll never be able to change the way I am"
"I'm pathetic at ..."
"I'm always forgetting to ..."
"I'm always making that mistake."
"I'll never find anyone who loves me."

These phrases or any similar ones are now banned from your vocabulary. For ever.

Inject the following phrases into your vocabulary

"I have the ability to improve from where I am now."
"I recognize I have some failings and I'm still an OK person."
"I'm making progress from where I was before."
"I'm taking steps to improve in the area of ..."
"I'm learning to learn from my mistakes."
"I'm taking action to improve my situation."
"I recognize and value the many qualities I have."
"I can handle this."
"I surprise myself with what I'm capable of achieving."

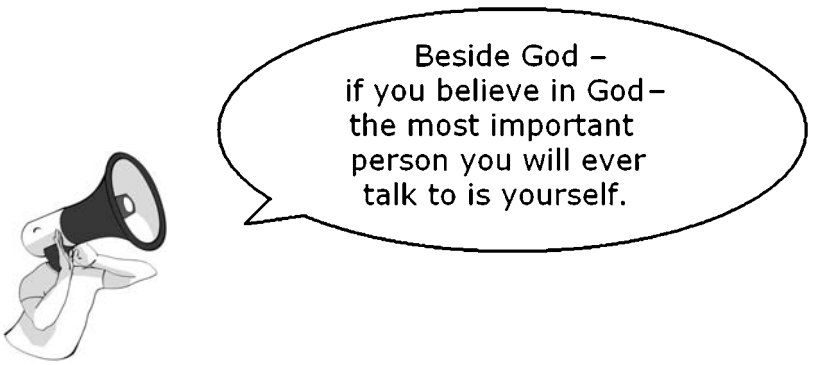
Plastic surgery is a radical step that can create a long-term impact on your appearance (and many would say your confidence as well). And to perform plastic surgery on your mind, you need to do more than simply read a few words on a page.

In some cases you may have to acknowledge that you could be guilty of *psychological self-harm* by the words you continually say to yourself and the thoughts and images you hold about yourself. Depending on how damaged you've become, you may need the help of an expert. I encourage you, if appropriate, to seek out the services of a therapist, particularly one who uses cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as a method to help their clients.

If such a radical step is not required – and in most cases it won't be – then reread the list of phrases to inject into your own vocabulary and choose three that you will write down and repeat to yourself at least ten times *every day* for the next 30 days. You can even write your own phrases – just make sure they're positive, empowering and say them (out loud if appropriate) like you believe it.

Here's a reminder of a phrase we looked at earlier, which really is an important insight to grasp.

The truth is ...



Trust me, I'm being totally serious. It would be so easy to skip over that last exercise and do absolutely nothing. If that's the case then you're not being your own best mate.

This stuff works. Choose three phrases, that's all.

It might only make a 10 percent difference – but as we know that's all you need, because a small change in what you say to yourself can make a big difference to how you see yourself.

Go on then, what are you waiting for?

In fact, I challenge you to choose three phrases or create your own and email me with them. I promise I will acknowledge your email personally (my email address is sumo@paulmcgee.com).

Right, that's the first three tips on how to avoid sabotaging your confidence: accept that "flaws are us," go easy on the boxing glove and perform plastic surgery on your mind. Now let's look at our fourth tip.

4 Get a grip of the wheel

Some people's life is like a car journey, except that they believe someone or something else is in the driving seat. That could be:

their boss
their parents
the government
fate
destiny

luck
their star sign

Whatever or whoever it is, it's not you. If that's the case, it's time for an honest sit down with yourself. It's time to spell out a few truths that may initially knock your confidence but ultimately will build and strengthen it.

If you believe you are where you are in life because of other people or luck or fate, you're deceiving yourself.

It's your car.

You have the keys.

Get a grip on the wheel and start driving it.

Quit the excuses.

No more hard luck stories.

No more blaming.

The destination of your life and how you get there is in your hands. If it's not, then you have allowed other people or circumstances to determine your destiny.

You might not have realized that before, but you do now – because I just told you.

Harsh?

Well, sometimes maybe a real friend needs to spell out the truth.

And sometimes the truth hurts.

But it's still the truth.

Maybe I'm being your Challenger.

Perhaps that's what you need right now.

Here's the score.

No one grew in self-confidence by placing their backside squarely and firmly in the passenger seat of their life.

And you won't either.

So change seats if you have to

and get both hands

on the wheel of your life.



- Really take time to consider this question: Is there an area in your life where you're being the passenger?
- If so, what are you going to do about it?
- Who's the best person to help you: A Cheerleader? A Challenger? A Coach? A Confidant?

5 Quit waiting to *feel* confident

How did you learn to ride a bike? Did you visualize yourself riding the bike and then vividly imagine how you would feel once you had ridden it? Me neither.

Did you use positive affirmations to help yourself?

Probably not.

So what did you do?

Got on the bike and started to pedal.

Hopefully you had someone's help when you first started, but there came a point when you were riding that bike on your own. And it was at that moment that you truly became confident in your ability to ride a bike.

In other words, your feelings of confidence came

after,

not before,

your action.

That's an important lesson to learn.

You can often reduce your anxiety before an event (and we will look at how to do that in the next chapter), but you can't always expect to feel totally confident.

It just doesn't always work that way.

And that's OK.

So, is there something you don't feel particularly confident about at the moment?

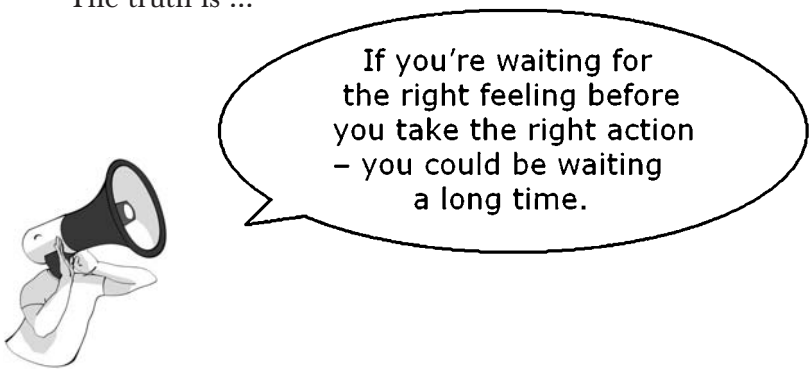
Are you feeling nervous?

Fine.

Most people in your situation with your levels of ability and experience would probably feel the same.

Get over it.

The truth is ...



Nerves are normal. So too is not always feeling totally confident before you do something.

That's a good thing.

Where's the challenges and thrills in life if you have to feel complete confidence before you do anything?

And here's something interesting.

It might even seem contradictory to what we've already been discussing.

Your thinking is important, but sometimes you can over-think!

You can analyse too much.

Sometimes you need to turn down the volume on your internal self-talk and just take action.

If you don't, there's a danger of paralysis by analysis.

Pit Stop



- Is there an action you've been putting off that you realize now is due to a lack of confidence?
- How uncomfortable do you feel about doing it? (On a scale of 1–10, where 10 is extremely uncomfortable.)
- In the light of what you've just read, what do you need to do now?
- So what are you waiting for?

The Personal Stuff



I've recently returned from a family holiday in Australia and New Zealand. While in New Zealand we visited Queenstown, which is known as the extreme sports capital of that country.

I don't do extreme sports. I'm not an adrenaline junkie. Gentle strolls along the beach or besides the river will do perfectly well for me, thanks. I don't even like theme parks as I suffer badly from motion sickness (if I'm ever a passenger in the back seat of your car you'll understand what I mean – and so will your car interior).

I once visited a children's theme park and, much to Helen's amusement, became quite unwell having gone on a roundabout with my then 3-year-old daughter. So I think it's fair to say that I am to extreme sports what Sumo wrestlers are to ballet – we're not particularly well matched.

But I'm writing a book on self-confidence and while I was in Queenstown I started thinking: "Am I destined to stay

in my own cosy comfort zone in terms of physical activity for the rest of my life?"

If so, fine. But I wanted to challenge myself. Was there an area where I could stretch myself to grow in confidence? Yes there was. Indoor golf.

Just kidding.

It's actually quite hard to walk around Queenstown without being confronted with images in shops of people doing bungee jumps. Matt, my 16-year-old son, was quite tempted by the idea. I also felt tempted

to sit down in a pub and feast on some delicious potato wedges.

Then I made a decision. "Matt, if you want to do a bungee jump I'll do it as well."

Case closed. I just made a decision. I'm going for it.

I refuse to play safe all the time, and when people ask "What was Queenstown like?" to answer, "The potato wedges were to die for."

So that's what I did. August 1st 2009, a few days before my 45th birthday, I did my first ever bungee jump.

How did I deal with the anxiety of facing up to such an experience?

I quit waiting to feel confident.

I decided not to think about it too much.

I simply chose a reputable company

admired the views

and then 4 3 2 1

Bungee!

It was quite an experience. I treasure the photos (I actually did a fairly decent impression of Superman as I dived off the ledge). But do you know what was the most important lesson from the whole experience?

Here it is.

It's not what you achieve that's always the key issue, but how you feel about yourself once you've done it.

Reread those words again. And make a decision to do something in your life where you stop the analyzing and decide to just take the action. I promise you, it will make a big difference.

And now for your sixth and final tip on how to avoid sabotaging your confidence.

6 Weigh up but don't be weighed down by criticism

Most people can find criticism challenging – especially if it's not given in a particularly helpful way. When that happens to you, you can choose one of the following responses:

- Ignore it – which is exactly what some people do.
- Dwell on it – an understandable response, particularly if your feelings have been hurt.
- Be defensive – again understandable, particularly if you feel the criticism is unjustified.
- Wait a while and then weigh it up – a response that might be easy to advise others to do, but not one that comes naturally to most of us, myself included.

It's that fourth response I want to focus on. It might not be easy to do, but it's a sign of emotional maturity and self-confidence when we're prepared to do it.

Here are some really useful questions to ask when weighing up criticism:

- How valid is that comment?
- What were the other person's motives for giving it?
- Can I understand their perspective?
- What part of the criticism (if any) could I agree with?
- Although natural, how is my defensive response helping this situation?
- Would I do anything differently next time?
- Am I prepared to thank my critic for their comments, even if I don't agree with them?

Pit Stop



- How do you usually respond to criticism? Which of the above questions could be really helpful for you to think about?
- Think about the last time you were criticized and work through the seven questions.
- Now that you've done so, what insights have you gained?

The Personal Stuff



ople were crammed into a hotel on the ts of Rochdale. Although it was a chal- g group, and despite my microphone rking, I thought that the first part of my class on dealing with change had gone larly well, all things considered.

At the break the head of diversity came to speak to me. "We've had one or two complaints about you, I'm afraid."

"Complaints?" I replied in a rather shocked and I'm sure slightly defensive tone.

"One or two women believe you've been racist and sexist in your language."

"Wow, I wasn't aware I was doing any of that. Can you be more specific?"

The head of diversity couldn't be more specific. She went back to the women to get more feedback. I offered to meet them to discuss their concerns in more detail.

They refused to meet me. They were unable to provide a specific example of any sexist language. However, they were quite clear about my racism.

"It's when you do your accents – they find that completely inappropriate."

Well, they had a point. I do use accents during my talk. One is in connection with a man called Gary from Northern Ireland, another is of a Geordie who wanted to buy a tee-shirt from me, and the other is of a Russian-speaking dog (it's a long story!) I felt a mixture of surprise and also relief when I became clearer about the specific allegation of racism.

I weighed up the feedback. I guess if you're from Northern Ireland, Newcastle or Russia there is a possibility that you might feel I'm mocking your accent. I'm still not sure you would interpret it as racism, but I could (if I stretched my imagination far enough) appreciate that I may have caused some offence.

I guess their comments had some validity but I'm not sure what their motives were in giving it. Everyone else in the room seemed happy with the session – including the head of diversity. Thousands of other people have heard me do a similar talk and never complained.

I continued to weigh up the feedback on my drive home but in case you're wondering, I don't do anything different as a result of this criticism. I didn't ignore it, I weighed it up.

As far as I'm concerned, my impression of a Russian-speaking dog is staying in my presentation.

It's not easy to receive criticism. If you react defensively and dwell on it, you'll be weighed down by it. It can erode your confidence.

But criticism can also be a gift if you choose to weigh it up and learn from it. It could contain an insight that helps you achieve your goal. Sometimes it won't drain your confidence – it could actually boost it. A small nugget of truth could make all the difference.



in A Nutshell

ix ways to become your own best mate (and avoid sabotaging your confidence):

at "flaws are us" – Give up playing the "Be Perfect" game.

2 Go easy on the boxing glove – It's time to quit beating yourself up.

3 Perform plastic surgery on your mind – Take radical steps in regard to what you say to yourself.
4 Get a grip on the wheel – Get back in the driver's seat and take charge of your life.
5 Quit waiting to feel confident – Start taking action and the confidence will follow.
6 Weigh up but don't be weighed down by criticism – Evaluate feedback, don't evade it.

Having discovered six insights and ideas to help you be your own best mate, now let's explore some specific situations when self-confidence will be crucial to your success.

7 How to Shine When Your Neck's on the Line



You're about to discover

Why you need to leave your comfort zone to achieve success.

How and why anxiety affects you, and how to face it and deal with it.

Two proven methods to calm down and prevent anxiety escalating.

Six simple ways to shine when giving a talk or presentation.

Two great insights on how to perform at interviews, including the four questions every interviewer wants answers to.

Five ways to be cool, calm and confident when dating other people.

Has Your Comfort Zone Become a Prison?

Have you ever avoided a situation because it made you feel uncomfortable? Join the crowd, as I guess most of us have.

But here's the challenge:

if you want to succeed and achieve your goals, then there are going to be times when you've simply got to move out of your comfort zone. And that's not easy to do. The very thought can create anxiety.

And what's the outcome? When you need to be at your best you often feel at your worst.

Painful, eh?

So what's the way forward?

Stay in your comfort zone?

Continual avoidance?

Or

face up to your fear and reap the rewards?

At the end of the day ask yourself this question: "Where do life's opportunities lie? Inside or outside my comfort zone?"

Moving out of your comfort zone can be scary business.

It can be risky.

That's why many people don't do it.

But if you do decide to step out, you need to find ways to reduce your anxiety and build up your confidence. And that's what this chapter's about.

We're going to explore practical ways to help you shine during three experiences that most people would probably not have top of their "things I always feel confident about doing" list. Here they are:

∞ Public speaking or making a presentation
∞ Job interviews
∞ Asking someone on a date

Each has the potential to catapult you to the next level of success – equally, each could be featured in the book *My Worst Ever Life Experiences.*

However, before we do, let's explore why we often hear about other people's bad experiences and how this bad news feeds our fears, distorts reality and increases our anxiety.

The Reason Bad News Spreads so Fast

Remember the good times? Remember hearing about how your friend's job interview went really well, or recall how your colleague's sales presentation went brilliantly? Or what about the time when you went into an exam feeling confident and you felt totally in the zone when you answered the questions? Or the time your friend went on a blind date and they both fancied each other?

Remember?

Hardly.

You see, according to a study on psychological science our brains tend to fixate on bad memories. How do they know

that? The study found that when we hear about an awful event, the part of the brain that processes emotions lights up far more than when we experience a neutral or positive event. This imprints heavily on our memory, hence we have the ability to remember and recall awful events.

Now here's the interesting thing. It's not that these negative events occur more often than positive ones – it's simply that we recollect them more easily and start to tell other people about them.

That's why most people have heard a story about the date or interviewer from hell or the time someone dried up while speaking in public. Because we've heard the stories, we trick ourselves into believing that these things happen more often than they actually do.

Why is that the case? There may be an evolutionary explanation – we are wired to remember threats rather than focus on or recall treats. It's a matter of survival.

Since one of the main functions of the brain is to keep us alive, it's particularly interested in helping us avoid potentially threatening situations. That's why we're wired to react with the fight or flight response in situations where the brain *perceives* a challenge to our survival.

This worked particularly well on the plains of the African Savannah when as part of a nomadic tribe you walk straight into the path of a sabre-toothed tiger. (OK, I realize they'd probably died out by the time humans were walking the planet, but you get my drift.) You're either going to fight it or run like crazy.

But there's a problem: your brain still thinks you're living in the land of saber-toothed tigers. So it's rather sensitive to stimuli or situations it perceives (there's that word again) as threatening – even if the threat is psychological, not physical.

And one of the biggest and often most traumatic psychological threats that people face is rejection. That's why putting yourself in a position where there's a chance you could be rejected increases your stress levels.

Why You're Stressed When You Need to Shine

In order to deal with a threat your brain secretes various chemicals – namely adrenaline and cortisol – to prepare you for battle.

There are no tigers.

There might not even be any real threat

but the brain's not taking any chances.

It doesn't hold an internal board meeting to discuss the pros and cons of taking action. It reacts. Sometimes inappropriately.

Before you know it, you're fleeing or fighting. Occasionally, you're freezing – your body seems to temporarily shut down and you find it almost impossible to access the rational part of your brain.

Chemicals are racing round your body.

Your heart is beating faster.

Your pupils are dilating.

Your palms are sweating.

Your throat is dry.

And the reason?

Saber-toothed tiger?

No.

You've just been asked to do a two-minute welcome at the annual staff conference – to over 500 people.

You're waiting to attend your interview panel.

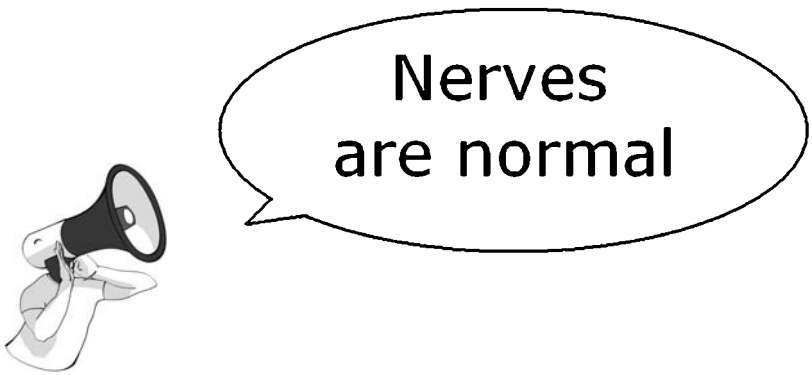
You've just spotted an extremely attractive person at the bar.

And you need to shine when you feel most stressed.

Ever felt that way?

OK, but hang on a minute. You need to remember this:

The truth is ...



Let's get one thing straight,

you don't want to eliminate your nerves.

Feeling confident does not mean that you never feel nerves. Confidence comes from controlling your nerves rather than them controlling you. As a friend of mine once said, "You can't get rid of the butterflies, but you can teach them to fly in formation."

That's really important to remember.

Nerves is simply a word you use to describe a set of feelings you're experiencing internally that's been triggered by your at times rather overprotective brain. In a different context, you may actually describe those same feelings as excitement (for instance getting married, or doing a bungee jump – although preferably not at the same time).

Your brain recognizes that you need to be at your best. It tries to help you by increasing your levels of concentration and putting you in a high state of arousal. That's why those chemicals are released and you experience certain physical symptoms.

The problems occur when arousal leads to anxiety – rather than preparing you to perform at your best, you're now emotionally and physically at your worst.

Ever had that experience?

At an interview?

Giving a talk?

On a date?

The following will help in whatever situation you're in.

Don't Flee from Your Anxiety, Face Up to It

When you're vaccinated you receive a weakened version of the micro-organism that threatens you. In other words, you receive a small dose of the stuff that could harm you. In many ways, gradual exposure to the thing you fear works in the same way.

That's why sometimes the only way to deal with your fears or anxieties is to be prepared to face up to them.

Feeling anxious is not the problem. The problem occurs when you allow the anxiety to overwhelm you and it prevents you from being at your best.

You see, being overanxious causes you to *exaggerate* the negative impact of an event or the likelihood of that event occurring.

You lose perspective.

It also causes you to *underestimate* your ability to deal with a situation.

And anxiety can escalate into fear.

Fear can cripple you.

It disables you. It can imprison you.

Depressed yet?

But now for the good news.

It doesn't have to be that way.

How to Calm Down

The following exercise will be a great help if you do it. (You will find it beneficial to say the statements out loud to yourself in a calm and quiet tone of voice.) I sometimes refer to it as the F.A.T. method.

Step 1 Feel your anxious feelings

"I'm experiencing feelings of anxiety at the moment."

Step 2 Accept them

"I recognize this anxiety has been triggered because I perceive some kind of threat or challenge to myself or loved ones."

Step 3 Thank them

"I'm grateful my brain wants to protect me. I now use my internal resources to deal calmly and appropriately with the situation."

Here's another exercise you may find helpful. It's a visualization exercise and one to do with your eyes shut.

Imagine a train arriving at a station. Each carriage of the train represents your thoughts – or your train of thoughts. Each carriage also represents a particular emotion or feeling.

Imagine yourself on the platform. As the train stops the carriage in front of you is marked "Anxiety."

You look into the carriage. There's definitely anxiety in there.

The doors open. You remain on the platform.

The doors close. The train departs.

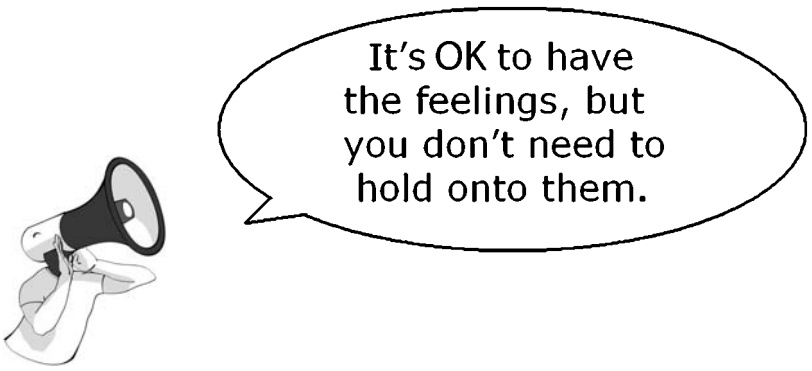
Watch the train as it pulls out of the station. Watch as you see anxiety leaving. Watch until you can no longer see the train.

Remind yourself:

"I feel feelings – but I am not my feelings."

"I think thoughts – but I am not my thoughts."

The truth is ...



Deep relaxation techniques are also a great strategy to alleviate anxiety – especially if you can find a couch, a set of headphones and your latest CD of whale sounds from the Antarctic.

Joking apart, all the above strategies will help, particularly if you can find the time and place to relax. But what if you can't?

Here are some further practical ways to help you shine when your neck's on the line. Let's explore the three situations separately.

Petrified of Public Speaking?

Actually, you're probably not petrified. You just tell yourself you are. In fact, there's some ridiculous research purporting to the fact that many people would rather die than speak in public.

Really?

So you would rather end your life now, leave your kids without a mother or father, never again experience the thrill of sex, marvel at a sunset, swim in the sea, feast on good food – you would rather miss out on all that than speak in public?

Yeah, right.

So let's put that myth where it belongs – in the bin. It makes a nice title for a magazine article or book, but there's one problem.

It's a lie.

You may be nervous. You may even say you're petrified, but you're not willing to die in order to avoid doing it, are you?

Get real.

So what can you do to be at your best when you've got to present or speak in public? Here are some simple but great ways to calm your nerves and wow your audience.

Six 10 Percent Tips For Public Speaking

1 Turn the spotlight onto your audience

Much of your anxiety when speaking occurs because you turn your focus and nervous energy inwards. You turn the spotlight onto yourself and the questions you ask yourself only escalate your anxiety:

"What will people think of me?"
"What if I forget my words?"
"What if I get asked some awkward questions?"
"What if I run out of time?"
"What if I dry up?"

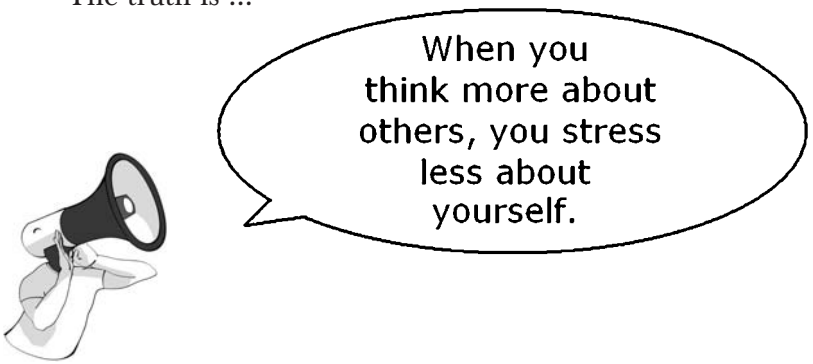
Not exactly the most positive and empowering questions, are they? And they're all focusing on you.

However, if you turn your attention and energy onto your audience and their needs, you might start asking some different questions:

"How can I make this talk relevant to my audience?"
"How can I best engage them?"
"What are their needs at the moment?"
"What's going on in their world?"
"If there was one key message I wanted to leave them with, what would it be?"

Suddenly it's your audience who's in the spotlight, not you.

The truth is ...



2 Say less, achieve more

Most people try to give too much information to their audience. Actually, the value lies not in how much you say, but in what you say and how you say it. It's about the quality of the information, not the quantity.

People are being bombarded with information. It can be overwhelming. They'll only retain a small percentage of your content – unless, that is, you say less but expand more.

For example, in a 30-minute talk or presentation it's more effective to cover three main points and use examples and illustrations to expand on each one than to try to cover nine or ten points. Your goal is to make your message memorable – and using too many facts achieves the exact opposite.

3 Put PowerPoint in its place

I use slides in my presentations, I'm not part of the anti-PowerPoint brigade – I just recognize that it's possible to rely too much on them, and when you do use them, to use them badly.

Slides are supposed to enhance your presentation. They're part of your act but they're not meant to take centre stage – they're part of the supporting cast.

So quit hiding behind them. If you do, you're just part of the scenery and could be seen as irrelevant.

There are lots of tips that you can easily access about the do's and don'ts of PowerPoint or similar packages. A particularly amusing but helpful piece about the subject can be found on www.youtube.com. Type in Don McMillan and view "How NOT to use PowerPoint."

4 Say it with props

If you're going to shine you need to be noticed and remembered. A great way to do both and increase the impact of your talk is to use props. Some of the props I use include tee-shirts, a broken record, a beachball and a boxing glove (if you want to see an example of how I use my props, go to www.TheSumoGuy.com).

5 Stories sell

If you want to appeal to people's emotions as well as their intellect, then tell stories. We're never persuaded to take

an action or adopt a particular point of view based purely on a rational, logical argument.

We're emotional. We connect with things we can relate to. We connect to the experiences of others that in some way echo our own.

That's not a new discovery. Just look at religious leaders from the past. When Jesus was asked "Who is my neighbor?" what did he do? Draw a pie chart? Get a map and divide the country into areas?

No. He told the story of the Good Samaritan. And 2,000 years later people still know it. It's packed with insight, intrigue and emotion – just like the stories of other religious leaders and philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre who communicated some profound insights through his book *Nausea* and used the story as a way to express his philosophical message. Political figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair all used stories to engage their audience and to strengthen the bond between them and their listeners.

Stories help us connect with others. They arouse emotions within people. (For more information on the art of telling stories, go to www.fripp.com and www.dougstevenson.com)

Not only can stories be powerful and memorable, they're also easier for you to remember than a stack of facts and figures. That alone can increase your confidence, as well as giving you a brilliant opportunity to dazzle your audience.

6 Avoid the hearse, go and rehearse

It's possible to die on stage. I know. I've seen it.

On one occasion I even experienced it.

Let me tell you, it's not a great experience attending your own speaking funeral.

As for why this happens, there could be several reasons: inappropriate humour, a patronizing approach or a group who were unhappy before you started speaking. (I was once asked to deliver a talk on delivering a great service – minutes after most of the group learnt they were to be made redundant.)

But one factor contributing to why you might die is simply due to a lack of preparation on your part.

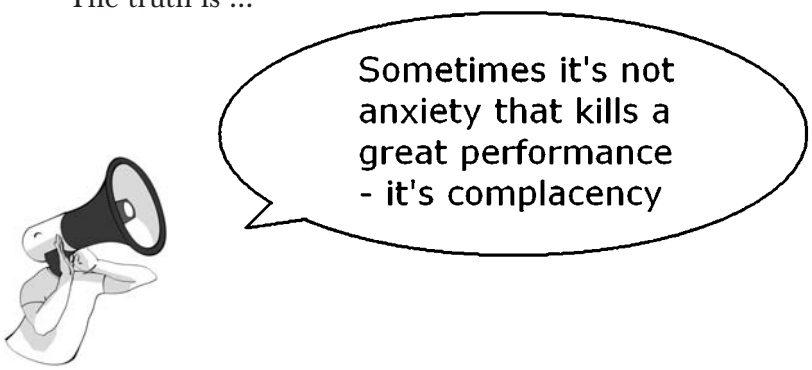
You didn't rehearse.

You weren't sure of your material.

You didn't check out the technology.

You didn't prepare enough – because deep down you didn't care enough.

The truth is ...



Tiger Woods still practices his golf. In fact, all the true top performers practice. Practice breeds confidence. It helps people perform at their best.

You don't want to die – you want to shine.

So quit winging it and start practising.

Practice not only what to say but how you say it.

You'll find that there are hundreds of articles and books, CDs and DVDs on how to be a better speaker. The point to remember is that it's not down to some innate mystical talent that you're born with. OK, some people do seem more naturally inclined to shine as speakers, but the gloss soon fades if they don't develop their skills.

When you apply the right polish, which typically comes in the form of practice and learning the skills of speaking, you'll be surprised at how much your confidence grows.

I run my own two-day workshop on presentation and speaking skills. It's not for the faint-hearted and neither is it a basic introduction. For more information email sumo@paulmcgee.com.

Here are those six ideas again:

- Turn the spotlight onto your audience.
- Say less, achieve more.
- Put PowerPoint in its place.
- Say it with props.
- Stories sell.
- Avoid the hearse, go and rehearse.



- Go back over the list of six ideas. Choose two to enhance your next talk or presentation.
- Think of the benefits that you and your audience will gain from using these ideas.
- Which ones will you pass on to someone else as a way to improve their next presentation?

Those are a few ideas about speaking, now let's explore another area that can be your downfall or your springboard to success.

Inspired at Interviews?

Whether it's going for a promotion or applying for a job externally, at some stage of the process you're going to sit down and be interviewed. It could be on a one-to-one basis or perhaps to a panel, but either way, you're definitely centre stage.

And the heat is on.

You may have passed the tests, played the games and done the role plays. The tough bit may feel like it's over, but all could be won or lost at the interview.

Here are some great ways to increase the chances of putting yourself in the best possible light.

Two 10 Percent Tips For Job Interviews

1 If you care then prepare

I've been asked some bizarre questions in interviews. For example, "If you were God, what would be an ideal night's television for you?" I resisted saying *Songs of Praise.*

Carrying on the religious theme, the same interviewer, having noted that I went to church, enquired, "Tell me what you think Jesus meant when he cried out on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

I was applying for a job in human resources. Crucifixion was not in the job description.

Another bizarre incident I heard about involved a student who arrived for an interview only to be confronted by the interviewer sitting reading a newspaper and demanding in an aggressive manner: "Grab my attention." The story goes that the student set light to the newspaper in order to do so!

But despite the rather bizarre approach of some interviewers, good ones actually only want to find out the answers to four main questions:

- Can you do the job?
- Will you fit into the company's culture?
- Why do you want to work here?
- How much will you work for?

While that sounds straightforward enough there are actually 101 ways to ask each of those questions. (Although it's worth noting that not all interviewers will recognise that when you cut to the chase, there are really only four questions they need answers to). When you realize this it can demystify the whole experience.

Now you're clearer on what the interviewer(s) wants to achieve from this meeting, you can start to prepare some answers. Ideally the interview will then simply be a two-way exchange of information rather than a game of chess where you're trying to outwit your opponent.

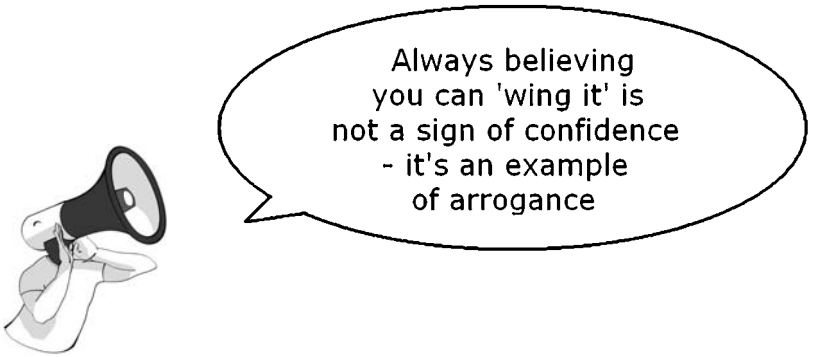
And unless you're unfortunate enough to be interviewed by a power-obsessed masochist with a hidden agenda (and to be fair, I have come across a couple), most interviewers would be thrilled if you're the right candidate.

A good interviewer provides you with the opportunity to shine – but you might not realize that they're doing so. Questions such as the following are designed to help you sell yourself:

"Tell me more about yourself."
"What's an achievement you're particularly proud of?"
"Why do you think you're the right person for the job?"
"What questions do you have for us?"

Just like speaking in public, it's possible to die in an interview. Sometimes it's simply because a question stumps you, but invariably it's due to your lack of preparation.

The truth is ...



So let's be clear. This might be a book about confidence, but the fact is that self-belief and feeling confident are not enough – unless you've done the preparation.

There are lots of people going for interviews full of self-confidence. But a good interviewer is keen to know what that confidence is based on – when you scratch the surface, what's really there? That's why you should expect challenging and probing questions.

Arrogance will undermine you and alienate you from the interviewer, so you've got to know your stuff. You've got to justify, with examples, your achievements. You have to present yourself in the best possible light. And that's why preparation before the interview is so important.

That leads us nicely on to our next point.

2 Shining without sinning

When you're going for a job – unless it's one that no one else wants: Roy Keane's yoga teacher, for instance – you have to see *yourself* as a product. You're the product and you've got to sell yourself.

And no matter what position you're applying for, you have to see yourself as a salesperson. (How can you get people to "buy you" unless you sell yourself?)

Now, that thought may do little to inspire you.

In fact, you may recoil in disgust at the very idea.

Why?

Possibly because you have a warped, distorted and, dare I say it, inaccurate perception of what makes a great salesperson.

Here are some common misconceptions about what makes a great salesperson:

- Must have the gift of the gab
- Pushy
- Arrogant
- Won't take no for an answer
- Money driven
- In love with themselves
- A liar

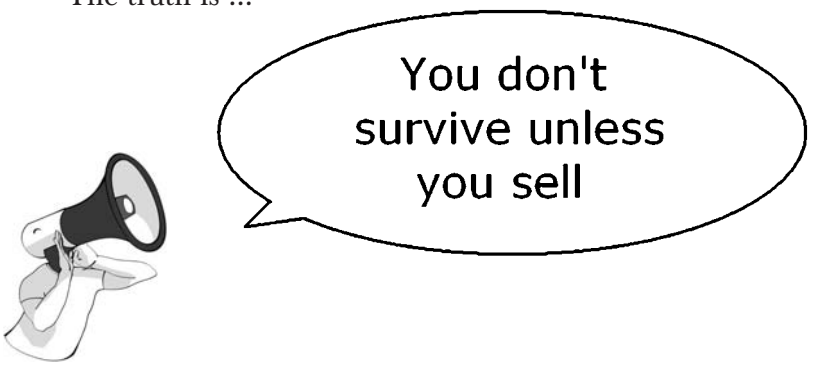
(And no, I wasn't describing your ex-partner.)

Those may be accurate statements to describe *some* salespeople, but the majority of successful ones aren't like the above (honest, they're not).

I've been running my own business for over 18 years. To succeed, I've needed to sell: to sell my ideas and to sell myself. I've had to influence and persuade people that I am worth their investment.

If you ask me what I do, I won't answer "I'm a salesman." But if you ask me what skills are required to succeed in business, then selling is right up there at the top of the list.

The truth is ...



And you won't succeed at an interview unless you sell yourself effectively and appropriately. So let's explore some of the qualities that salespeople need to succeed:

- ***Belief in the product.*** You have to believe in the value of what you're selling and how it will help your customers.
- ***Know your stuff*** about the product, the market and the customer.

- ***Smart persistence.*** Rejection comes as a part of the job. But you need to know when to persist and when to move on – hence smart persistence.
- ***Self-respect.*** Your relationship with yourself and how much self-respect you have will influence your relationships with others and the respect you show in how you communicate with them.
- ***Motivation.*** You need this particularly in challenging times. Recognize that depending on your own personality or current circumstances, different factors will motivate you. That might be money, but often a more powerful motivating factor is recognition.
- ***The ability to spin.*** Clearly, you want to present yourself and your product in the best possible light. The phrase "spin doctor" has received a lot of negative press. But I live in the real world and the reality is that we all spin – we all put our own perspective on the truth.



- List three of your personal qualities and think of a specific example to illustrate each one.
- Identify an achievement you're particularly proud of. What does that success say about you?
- In what way will your answers to the two questions above benefit an employer?

So when does shining become sinning?

- When we tell a blatant lie.
- When we cannot back up our achievements with any examples.

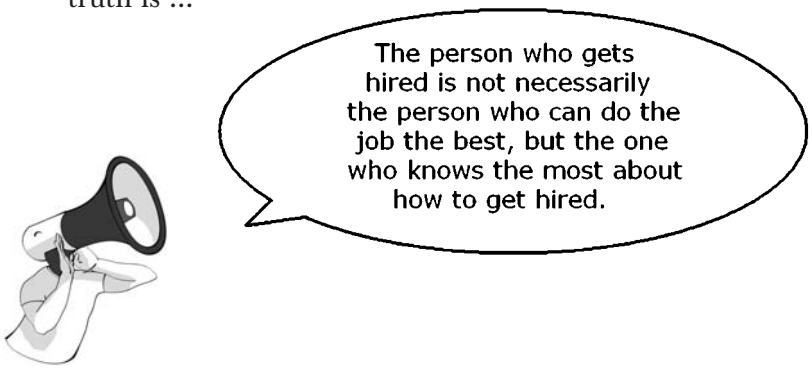
- When we waffle.
- When we elevate ourselves by putting others down.
- When we rely on arrogance rather than ability.

(Examples of the above have been consistently demonstrated by contestants on the hit British TV series *The Apprentice*.)

So shine in your interviews by:

- Researching the company, its markets and its competitors.
- Researching yourself and listing not only your strengths and qualities, but examples of each. (It's critical that you do this.)
- Respecting yourself for who you are, not just what you do.
- Recognizing that setbacks are also stepping stones to success. (A friend of mine kept all his job application rejections in a folder marked "The they've missed out on me file.")
- Understanding that your shining might threaten some people. That's their problem, not yours – but if they're the interviewer, it may be the reason you don't get the job.
- Always seeking to invest in yourself and your development. (The American philosopher Jim Rohn says, "Work hard on your job, but work harder on yourself.")

To end this section on interviews, remember that the truth is ...



For further information you may want to read my book *How to Write a C.V. that Really Works*, which includes a section on job interviews. I have also listed some other helpful books on this topic in the More Stuff That Will Help section at the end of the book.



- What's the biggest mistake you've ever made at an interview?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- Apart from job interviews, where else do you need to see yourself as a salesperson?

So we've learnt how to shine when speaking in public and at interviews. Now on to the final section of this chapter: asking someone on a date.

A Date with Destiny?

There's a popular book on the subject of dating called *The Game*. And whether we like it or not, dating is a game.

Other animals have their rituals – peacocks display their plumage, for instance. But when it comes to close encounters of the romantic kind, the only thing some people display is a shed load of ignorance.

Whether you're new to dating or returning to the scene after a relationship break-up, there are a number of ways to prevent the experience becoming a disaster. (And even if you've no intentions of ever going on a date, you're still about to discover lots of ideas that will help you in a variety of social situations.)

I've written a book on relationships and I've been interviewed by the media on the art of dating, but for this section of the book I'm also grateful to my brother Andy, who at the time of writing is single. His insights come from both experience and his study of this fascinating subject. Like the rest of this book this section contains a western cultural bias, but whatever your culture, I promise there are some ideas and insights to help you shine.

Five 10 Percent Tips For Dating

1 Perspective pays

Perhaps the main reason for anxiety when it comes to dating is the pressure we put ourselves under:

"What if they say no?"
"What if she doesn't like me?"
"What if she's the one?"

Relax.

Your primitive brain is currently in the driving seat and as things stand, believes that it may have spotted a potential mate. As a result, it's highly focused and completely blind to all other possible mates.

It also believes it's in competition with other predators who are seeking the same prize.

You feel a surge in adrenaline.

The pressure is on.

Or is it?

I appreciate that trying to be logical when it comes to physical attraction is a bit like giving a toddler their favourite sweets and saying: "Save them for later."

It's not easy.

But on the other hand, it's not impossible.

So let's apply a little logic and not allow our primitive brain to completely hijack our thought processes.

Let's imagine you find someone especially attractive and want to pursue your interest further. Remember, your aim in approaching the other person is not to ask for their hand in marriage. (If it is, I feel you've missed a few stages in the process.)

Neither are you asking them to commit to a romantic relationship.

Remind yourself that what you are in fact saying is, "If I'm honest, I find myself sufficiently attracted to you that I'd like to spend a little more time getting to know you."

And that's it.

Your neck's not really on the line. Take the heat off yourself. You're taking the first step. Depending on the other person's response, it might be the first step on the road to nowhere.

But maybe it's the first step of a relationship journey that could lead to a long-term commitment. Who knows?

And that's the point. Who knows? No one.

That is, until you decide to take the first step.

And if they say no?

I'm not going to say "don't take it personally" – because you will. And if you had built up your expectations about where this relationship might end up, then you're going to be disappointed.

For a while.

But guess what?

Nothing has changed. This person wasn't in your life previously and they're still not in your life now. There are still several million possible options out there.

So get things into perspective.

2 Let's do coffee

Given the need to apply a little *less* pressure to yourself when you're asking someone on a date, don't suggest going for dinner.

First, it's expensive – unless you choose somewhere really cheap, and that's clearly not sending the right message.

Secondly, it's long.

It's a long time to be together, particularly if things are not going well. So unless you skip starters and desserts, most dinner dates will usually be in excess of 90 minutes. That's like sitting through an entire football match. And believe me, that can seem an awfully long time if things aren't going well (just ask any Bradford City supporter).

Thirdly, dinner dates aren't the best way to put people at ease:

"Do I talk with my mouth full?"
"Which spoon do I use?"
"I can't believe the price of their fish and chips."
"I don't understand half the menu."

So do coffee instead. It's cheap – compared to a three-course meal anyway. It doesn't have to take too long, but if things are going well you can always have a second cuppa.

There's also less need for etiquette. There aren't many ways to create a bad impression when drinking coffee (but don't slurp and do make sure your cappuccino doesn't leave you with a frothy moustache, which in all honesty isn't an attractive trait in women).

Finally it's a relaxing environment, where you're more likely to be yourself and feel less pressure than on a more formal date.



Where you go on a date can say a lot about you as a person. My dad used to take my mum round graveyards – he was fascinated by what was written on gravestones. Despite that, they still married.

I took my wife Helen to see my local football team. The game was not too absorbing, but at least it proved her love for me.

I had less success with a girl called Bernadette. I took her to the cinema to see the film *Scum*. It stars a young Ray Winston and graphically portrays life in borstal (a young offenders' institute). It ends with a gang rape scene and the victim committing suicide.

That was the last time I saw Bernadette. There's no pleasing some people.

When I was a student I met a woman called Ruth who was a singer in a band by night, but worked in a bakery by day. Over time it became clear that our eye contact was increasing and our smiles broadening as I checked out the meat and potato pies.

She invited me over for dinner. I was thrilled. For a student any offer of a free meal was gratefully received and the bonus was I might get a snog thrown in as well.

I was disappointed. My meal (if you can call it that) consisted of a Fray Bentos chicken and ham pancake and a tin of cheap baked beans. I wasn't impressed. I regretted bringing her flowers. There was no snog either.

A year later we married.

We didn't really – I made that last bit up.



- Can you remember your first date? How were you feeling beforehand?
- Have you ever had a dating disaster?
- What did you learn from the experience?

3 Dress with care

Let's get one thing clear, "never judge a book by its cover" has to be one of the worst pieces of advice ever given when it comes to dating.

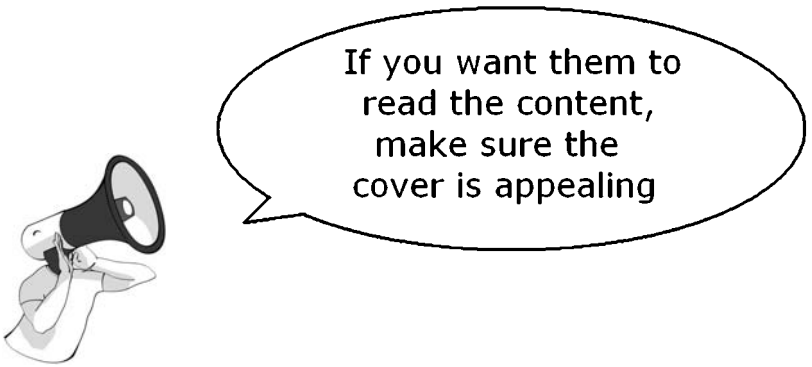
It's also potentially dangerous.

We're hard wired to make snap decisions about people. At a very basic level, the question we're always asking when we encounter someone for the first time is

"friend or foe?"

These snap decisions are not always right (and our prejudices and culture influence them). But we can't ignore them.

The truth is ...



Here are some actions to take:

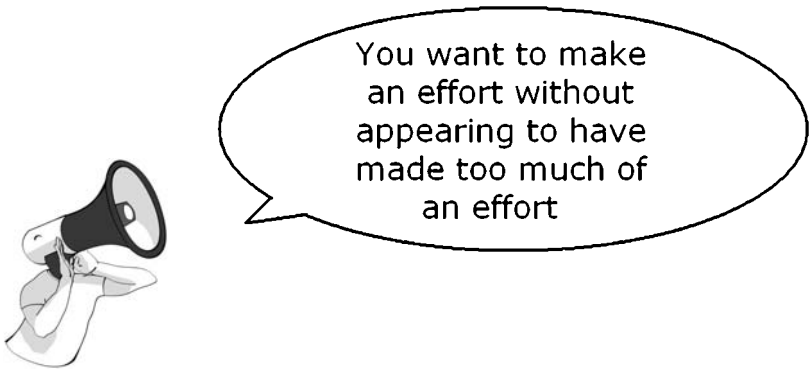
- Do you have access to a full-length mirror? If not, get one.
- Take a look at your wardrobe. Is it time to dump some of the old favourites that looked really good on you – ten years ago?

- ∞ Get some feedback from a good but honest friend or colleague about what you wear.
- ∞ Ignore any advice your mother gives you about your clothes.
- ∞ Become more conscious of your clothing and what it says about you.
- ∞ Watch some fashion makeover programs – they really can provide good, practical and often cheap advice.

I appreciate this may all sound superficial, but we're dealing with how the world is, not how you want it to be. Making an effort with your appearance invariably makes you feel better about yourself, which leads to increased self-confidence.

However, a word of warning. Remember that you're meeting for coffee – over-dress for the occasion and you're sending the wrong message.

The truth is ...



That's great advice for a first informal date, although clearly you need to raise the stakes at more formal gatherings.

And if the person pays you a compliment about what you're wearing, *don't* reply with any of the following:

"Oh, I got them really cheap in a sale."
"Oh this old thing – I've had it for ages."
"I'm not sure, I think it makes my boobs look big" (definitely one to avoid if you're a man).

If someone pays you a compliment, two words will suffice: "Thank you."

In fact, being able to receive a compliment is in itself a sign of confidence.

4 Be remembered – for all the right reasons

I can think of plenty of ways to be remembered for all the wrong reasons:

- Bad breath.
- Turning up late.
- Body odour.
- Talking about ex-partners.
- Never asking about the other person.
- Moaning about your health or life in general.

(Have you ever met or dated anyone who's exhibited any of the above?)

So how can you stand out from the crowd without appearing proud? Here are two ways.

Be interested

Make sure you show plenty of interest in the other person. Listening isn't about waiting for your turn to talk. It's a brilliant opportunity to show the other person respect as well as help you discover more about them.

But avoid the Spanish Inquisition. You're trying to establish a connection, not explore deep-seated personal issues. It's a date, not a therapy session.

If the conversation starts getting heavy and you sense you're moving into deep unchartered waters, bring things back to shallow water by changing the subject. It might help to have a couple of questions prepared in advance to drop into the conversation at an appropriate time:

- Who would you most like to have a one-to-one with (living or dead)?
- Complete the phrase "not a lot of people know this but ..." (something interesting or memorable about you that not a lot of people know).

Whichever questions you use, make sure that you have some. There's nothing more damaging to your confidence than long periods of uncomfortable silence.

Be interesting

That can be a challenge to some people. Having the attitude "But I can't think of anything interesting about me" may explain the reason for your single status.

Don't worry if you don't have any particular hobbies – there's bound to be something you do in life that's interesting and you're not too embarrassed to admit to.

But do give some thought to how you talk about yourself and your interests. (Just as you would at a job interview – although hopefully this is a less formal experience.)

For instance, as you may have gathered by now I enjoy football. But if I was on a date and was asked what I enjoy, I could say either of the following:

- "I enjoy football." If the other person doesn't like football, that could be the end of the conversation.
- "I love football. There's nothing to compare to going to a live match. Have you ever been in a stadium full of tens of thousands of passionate people? It's amazing. I love the atmosphere. The tension. The whole build-up to the game. Football for me isn't just about watching 22 men kick around a bag of wind. It's so much more. It's about meeting up with my mates, the banter, the expectation of success. I love the whole experience. Not just the 90 minutes." (Aren't you impressed with how exciting I managed to make going to see Bradford City sound?)

That might sound over the top, but it's up to you to communicate about yourself in an engaging way. Even if the

other person doesn't share your interest, they're still likely to be impressed. Who wants to spend time with someone lacking in any passion for life?

Make sure that you apply the same strategy when talking about your work. Let me elaborate.

Let's imagine you're in a profession that some people, rightly or wrongly, think is fairly boring – you're an accountant. How about describing what you do in a more intriguing way?

For instance, you could say: "I'm in the most misunderstood profession in the world. People pay me to save them money, while staying on the right side of the law."

Or you could just say, "I'm an accountant."

The choice is yours.

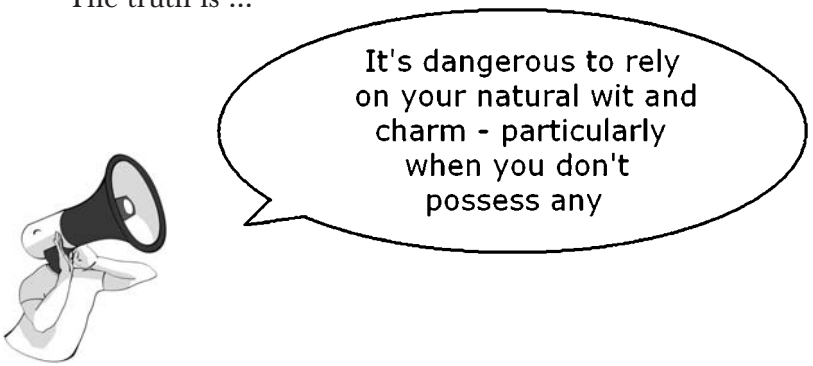
Remember, the person opposite you is deciding whether they want to see you again. They're deciding whether they want to spend more time in your company. They're judging you by the cover. And that isn't just simply based on what you look like, but also how you come across as a person. If the chapter titles don't look interesting, don't expect them to read further.

The bottom line?

You might not get a second chance to create a first impression.

This is your time to shine. Don't waste it.

The truth is ...





- On a scale of 1–10, how good are you at showing genuine interest in other people?
- What would be the benefits to you if you talked a little less and listened a little more?
- Think about your work and interests. How could you describe them in a more engaging or intriguing way?
- Write down the top three most interesting things about yourself.

In terms of your date with destiny, let's remind ourselves of the ten percent tips we've looked at so far:

- Perspective pays.
- Let's do coffee.
- Dress with care.
- Be remembered – for all the right reasons.

Here's your fifth and final one.

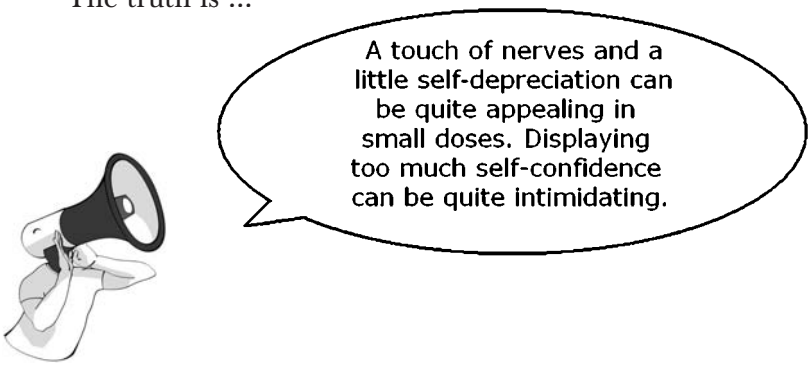
5 Rejections are reality

It's rare to find anyone who hasn't experienced some form of rejection. So when it happens to you, take some comfort in the fact that you're sharing in a universal experience.

The key is not whether it happens or not, but how to respond when it does.

First, be aware that one reason for your rejection could be down to your level of confidence – you may be perceived as having too much.

The truth is ...



Secondly, rejection presents you with an opportunity. Now that could be an opportunity to purchase a voodoo doll and a set of pins, or to book a large hall for your pity party.

Or it could also be a time for some honest reflection.

The value of this reflection depends on whether it's spent with your inner critic or your inner coach. (Remember, we

looked at this in the chapter "How to be your own best mate.") Typically, the emotional and rather loud voice of the inner critic kicks in initially:

"I'm fat."
"I'm ugly."
"I'm destined to remain single."

You might be surprised to hear that such comments are designed to protect you from further rejection. If you believe you're fat, ugly and destined to remain single, you're unlikely to put yourself in a position where you're going to be rejected again.

And if you buy into that belief, you'll probably remain

unhappy and unfulfilled

for the rest of your life.

So how about you sit down and have a little chat with your inner coach instead?

Once the initial emotions of rejection have subsided (I'm not suggesting they will disappear), you may want to reflect on the following:

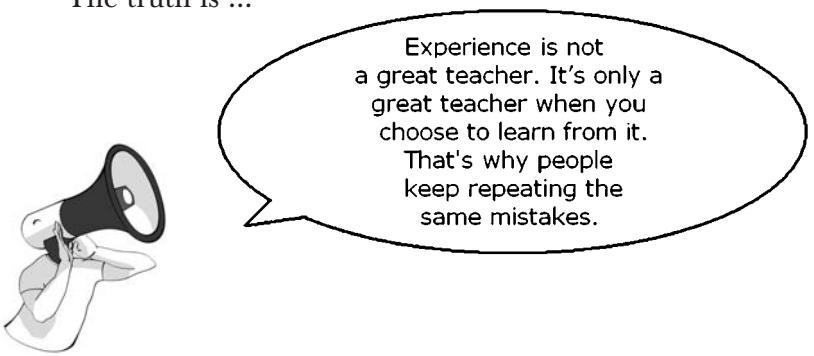
- Was I perhaps a little hasty in asking that person on a date?
- Would I use the same approach when meeting someone else for the first time? (Perhaps showing them your tattoo on your left buttock was construed as being a little too forward?)
- What went well in my interaction with that person?

- What would I do differently next time? (Keep your trousers on perhaps?)

And if the rejection comes after a few dates:

- What have I learnt about myself from this experience?
- Were we really compatible?
- In what way might I have contributed to the relationship ending?
- What did I enjoy about the relationship?
- What lessons can I take from this experience into my next relationship?

The truth is ...





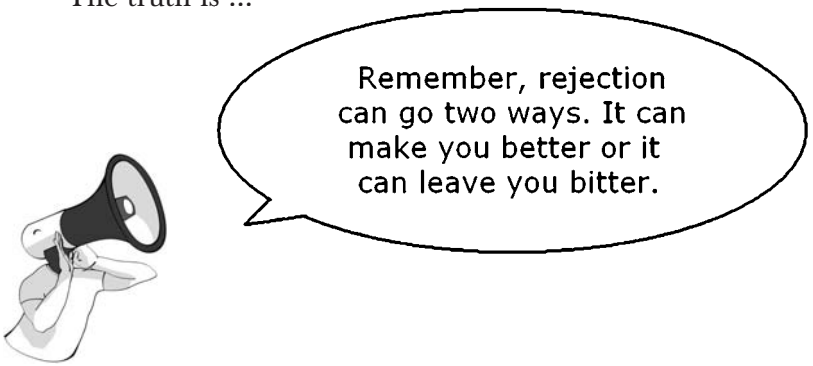
Pit Stop

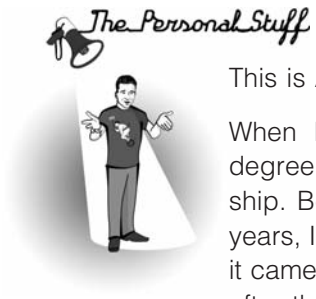
Let me be your challenger for a moment.

- If you keep making the same relationship mistakes, what are you trying to prove?
- What are the payoffs for you in repeating the same mistakes? Don't try to convince yourself that there aren't any, because there are.
- What have you learnt about yourself from relationships with others?

To explore any questions raised in this Pit Stop, you might find it useful to read about the first SUMO principle, "Change your T-shirt." There are details about my book in "the 'More Stuff That Will Help Section'."

The truth is ...





This is Andy's story:

When I was at university doing a second degree, I split up from a long-term relationship. Because we'd been partners for seven years, I was completely out of my depth when it came to dating women. My first relationship after the split was with someone I'd prefer to refer to as the Peroxide Blonde (hey, who says I'm bitter?). Peroxide was not the most reliable of women. We'd plan to meet up and she'd fail to show up – often without phoning to let me know. Other times she would cancel at the last minute. In short, she didn't respect my

time, which I guess is another way of saying she didn't respect me.

In hindsight I realized I liked her more than she liked me. So instead of pulling her up on her behaviour, I let it go, hoping that things would get better. They didn't.

My feelings for her grew more intense. Her respect for me nose-dived.

I got hurt. Big time.

But I've learnt from the experience. I asked myself what I would do differently next time, faced with similar behaviour.

I decided that if a similar situation ever arose again, I would either mention it and give the person a chance to show me it was merely a one-off, or I would finish the relationship straight away. I wasn't going to allow myself to become carried away again by the excitement and emotions that accompany the first few weeks and months of a new relationship with someone who was unreliable.

I think it's far better to decide in advance what you want and what you're prepared to live with in a relationship, rather than to try to work it out while you're forming intense feelings for someone. If you don't do this, you are much more liable to be hurt and have your confidence undermined, for two reasons. First, you show you don't respect yourself because you tolerate behaviour you are not happy with. That makes it harder for the other person to respect you.

Secondly, you are far more likely to mention something when your emotions are running high, and this can be disastrous. I fell into that trap, thereby giving Peroxide

Blonde a reason in her mind to justify her treatment of me. The pain and humiliation I felt as a result would both have been avoided if I'd worked out what my boundaries were in advance and stuck to them.

And sorry to sound unromantic about all this, but I believe that dating can often be a numbers game. No matter how confident you are, you may have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince or princess.

The key is to have the confidence and self-belief to realize this. Some people settle for the frog, which is why they're unhappy. I'm now confident enough to carry on kissing because I know my princess is out there somewhere!

If you want to find out if Andy has finally met his princess, email him at andyj.mcgee@gmail.com.



in A Nutshell

- There will be times in life when you're faced with some choices that could ultimately affect your career, your earning potential and who you spend the rest of your life with.
- But these opportunities come with a price attached – it's going to cost you your place in your safe, secure and cosy comfort zone. You're going to have to step out into new territory and, what's more, you've got competition for the prize.
- Nerves are normal but you need to make sure you take steps to reduce your anxiety and avoid feeding your fears.
- Understand that your primitive brain's desire to protect you can sometimes undermine you.

No single idea or insight will cause you to shine out from the crowd. However, this chapter has given you over a dozen 10 percent tips and insights to help you turn the spotlight on your qualities and project yourself in the best possible light, whether that's speaking in public, being interviewed or going on a date.

Make sure you use them. And when you do, make sure you email me to let me know how they've helped you (sumo@paulmcgee.com).

8 What to Do When the Ship Hits the Flan



You're about to discover

Five
insights
and ideas to
help you recover
your confidence from
challenging setbacks.

Grieving is good.

It ain't what you see, it's the way that you see it.

Park the pride.

Learn the lessons.

Molehills matter.

Setbacks Happen

In the chapter on "Who crushed your confidence", we explored how people can crush, undermine and erode your confidence.

But it's not always about the impact of people.

Events, experiences and setbacks can all dramatically affect your self-belief and confidence. It could be a divorce, being made redundant, an illness, a car crash, the death of a loved one, a failed exam, a missed promotion or a period of unemployment.

And there's plenty more you could add to the list.

OK so there's the odd person who appears to coast through life, who seems almost immune from the challenges that beset the rest of us – at least on the surface, anyway.

But they're in the minority.

The rest of us are all likely at some stage to suffer a setback or challenge that rocks our steady world.



- Review the list of events and setbacks mentioned above. Have you experienced any of these or something similar?
- Recall now how that experience affected you and your confidence.
- Look for ideas in this chapter that will help you if a similar event occurs in the future.
- Now think of someone you know who's having a tough time. Look for ideas to help rebuild their confidence.



In this book you've read about me losing my job through ill health. Well here's how it all began.

April 1989, I think it was a Tuesday. I'd been summonsed to the company's head office, situated south west of London.

My wife Helen drove me there. She had to. Having been diagnosed with ME (which is short for myalgic encephalomyelitis and is also known as chronic fatigue syndrome), I didn't have the energy to wash my own hair, so driving was clearly out of the question.

I was conscious that there was a certain amount of cynicism surrounding my illness. The press dubbed it "yuppie flu" and at times I seemed to be surrounded by well-meaning friends who had PhDs in coming up with crass comments.

"It's God's way of getting you to slow down," remarked one. Another approached me with his usual tact and diplomacy.

"You've got to be the luckiest bloke in the world, Paul. You sit around the house all day watching TV and doing absolutely nothing, while your wife works and then cooks your tea when she comes home. I envy you."

I sometimes imagine that if I'd had the energy I might have gently (well to begin with, anyway) squeezed his balls in a vice-like grip and used them to make earrings. While sarcastically adding.

"Thanks for your feedback, Dave. Your words of wisdom have really helped me come to terms with my debilitating

illness that eight out of ten doctors are not even convinced is genuine. I feel a lot better now. Thank you."

But I didn't. After all, Dave was simply being Dave. What else did I expect?

Plus I was knackered. Completely knackered. I didn't have the energy to crush a grape, never mind Dave's testicles.

And so there I was. At head office. It seemed that all the people I spoke to that day were playing a game called "How to have a deep and meaningful conversation without ever making eye contact." They were ruddy good players.

Masterful, in fact.

Finally, after a series of management-speak meetings where lots was said but little actually understood, I was given the news.

"We're letting you go," said Kevin from Human Resources. He didn't even use my name.

"Letting me go. What do you mean?"

"Well, it's your illness. There's no way of telling when or even if you'll ever recover. We have no choice really."

"No choice," I muttered under my breath. You've plenty of bloody choices, I thought. In fact, let's get a flip-chart out and brainstorm what choices we do have.

"We will, of course, give you a month's notice," added Kevin generously.

"Er, thank you," I replied, as if I should be grateful for this immense act of kindness that was being bestowed on me from on high by the Human Resources department.

And that was it.

Five minutes later, with the aid of my walking stick and the guidance skills of Penny, Kevin's assistant, I found myself back in reception.

Helen, who'd been patiently waiting for me, looked up from the body-building magazines she'd been perusing. I told her the news. I no longer had a job.

The ship had well and truly hit the flan.

Whatever challenges you or those you know face, the key question is this:

How can you recover from such a setback?

And when your confidence is crumbling, how can you rebuild it?

Well, here's the good news.

You're about to discover how.

Your 10 Percent Tips on How to Rebuild and Recover Your Confidence

1 Grieving is good

Self-confidence is not another term for the art of self-delusion or self-deception. Appearing fine to the outside world when deep inside you're feeling pain and brokenness is not an effective approach. Self-confidence and vulnerability are not diametrically opposed – they're not like oil and water, they do mix.



Our friend Chloe's marriage was a short one. In fact, very short. She got married just before Christmas and we enjoyed a meal with her and Graham, her new husband, at their home the following March. By May the relationship was over.

Chloe was devastated. For a while she became a virtual recluse. She carried on working, but rarely socialized with anybody. I guess she needed to grieve.

Her self-esteem seemed shattered but slowly, over time, the pieces were gradually put back together.

It did take time. It was a slow process.

And that's the key – it's a process.

There's no pill to pop that can eliminate the pain. There's no answer to give that can instantly heal the wounds.

You see, it's not time that's the healer.

It's the process.

And as Chloe worked through the loss of her dream, her marriage, she once again began to rebuild her confidence. But it still took time.

You can't rush grief.

We'd like to

but we can't.

It's a process – a journey that you go through. And pain, no matter how hard you try to avoid it, is part of the human experience.

Why we need to grieve

One of my principles is called "Hippo Time Is OK." Based on the fact that hippos wallow, it's a recognition that when a major setback occurs you cannot simply "get over it."

You do actually need a period of mourning, grieving and reflecting.

Often these emotions are associated with death, but they can relate to any form of loss you experience. Of course, the strength of those emotions and the length of time you experience them for will vary, depending on the event and its impact on you.

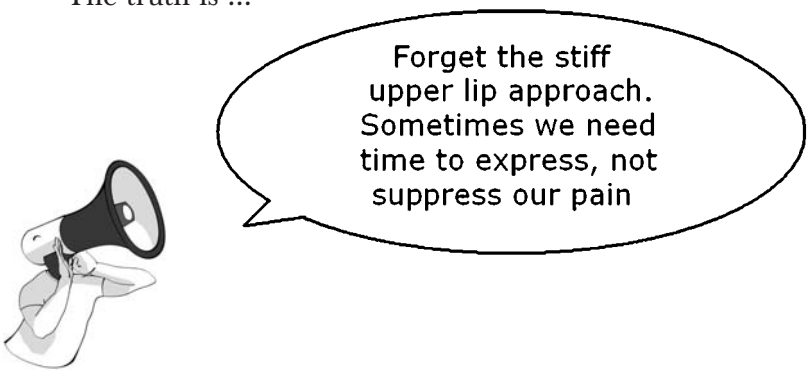
But you still need to take time to recover.

Sometimes your loss is very tangible, such as being made redundant or the breakdown of a relationship.

But grief can also relate to the loss or the ending of a hope or a dream – perhaps not getting the job you so desperately wanted or failing to buy the house you'd dreamt of owning.

These emotions are valid and not a sign of weakness. But to ignore or deny them can be emotionally damaging.

The truth is ...



However, let me make one thing clear:

This is not an invitation to pour your heart out in public and book yourself onto a daytime confessional television programme.

Grieving is good

but

it doesn't have to be high profile and it doesn't have to last too long.

Be careful when you're in this place.

Watch what you say to yourself during this time. If you're not careful, your own words will drag you further and deeper into the mud.

A useful statement to make to yourself during your grieving or wallowing would be:

I'm OK, and I'm not OK. I'm still the person I was before this event, with all my strengths and qualities. But I'm also hurting from what's happened. However, these feelings are temporary and they do not define me. Neither will this event determine my future – my response to what's happened will be the determining factor.

I allow myself to feel low, to feel angry and to feel pain. That is a healthy and normal response. But I will not remain feeling low, angry and in pain. This is temporary. It's part of my journey. It's not my destination.

I will pull through – if I choose to. And that's what I choose to do.

Because deep down, at the centre of who I am, I know I'm still OK.

(If you would like to download the above, please visit www.TheSumoGuy.com.)

The truth is ...



Grieving is good - for a time. To wallow is not a weakness - neither is it a way of life.



Pit Stop

- What are your feelings about what you've just read? Do you grieve too much or not enough?
- When did you last grieve over a loss?
- How long did your grieving last?
- How do you get yourself going again?

The Personal Stuff



Becoming ill with ME (or chronic fatigue syndrome) has to have been one of the biggest challenges of my life.

After my diagnosis I worked hard at remaining optimistic and convinced myself that full recovery was around the corner. I was known as a positive person and I wanted to live up to my reputation. If I told people how I genuinely felt and was honest about my fears, I believed that would be a sign of weakness.

You see, if I was being totally honest I knew that my illness was not life-threatening, but it could be life-limiting. And questions danced around my mind.

Would I ever work again?

Would we have kids?

Would I end up in a wheelchair?

It took me some time to wake up to the fact that it was OK to grieve not just for the loss of my health, but for the loss of my job and the loss of the future I'd hoped for.

I didn't share my grief with everyone, but Helen, my wife, was and remains my confidant. She'd previously listened to my dreams. Now she listened to my despair. She knew my aspirations but now she knew my anguish.

It's not easy to grieve alone – we need other people to share our burden. Fortunately, I found my burden carrier in my wife and a few close friends.

I hope that when you need to grieve you also find the same level of support.

But a word of warning. Whatever you do, make sure that your supporters are not Awfulisers (see Chapter 3) – you've got enough problems as it is without their help.

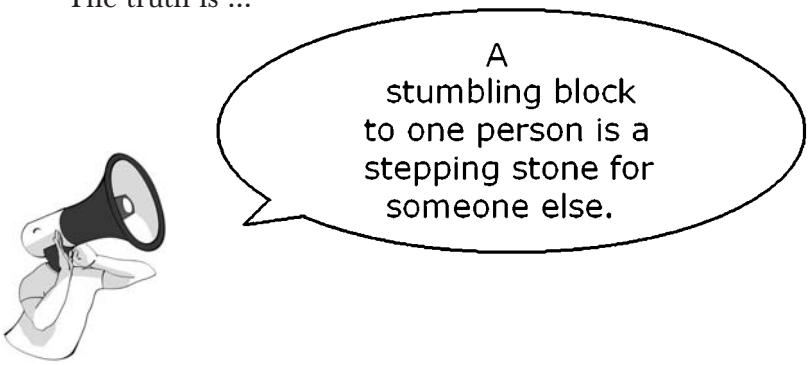
That's the first insight on how to rebuild and recover your confidence when the ship hits the flan. Let's look at another really important idea.

2 It ain't what you see, it's the way that you see it

Here's something I find interesting. Have you ever noticed that two people can experience the same event, the same

setback, and yet react completely differently? For one person the setback could be the final straw, while the other simply laughs it off.

The truth is ...



So how can you be the person who uses a setback as a stepping stone? How can you respond more effectively when the ship hits the flan?

The key is perspective.

How you see the event, and the *meaning* you attach to it, will determine how you respond.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

It's not.

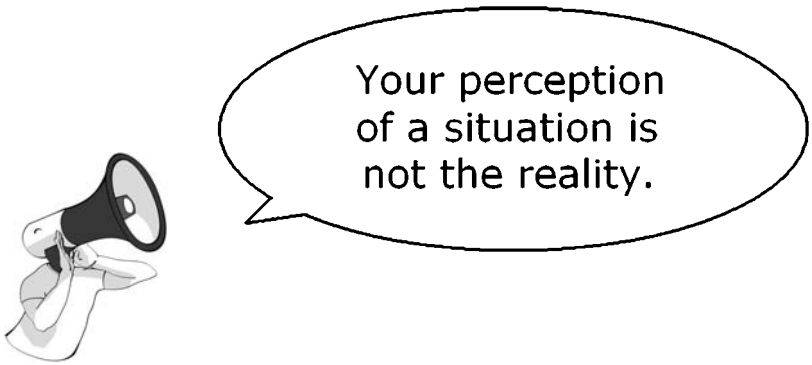
It requires a rational approach – and, as you've discovered already, that's not easy. The reality is that as humans we're far more emotional creatures than we are rational. When trouble strikes we are rarely rational.

And that's understandable. Emotions are what make us human. But we often allow them to derail us and distort our picture of reality. Emotions affect how we see the world.

Why do two people respond differently to the same event? Because we don't see the world for what it is. We see the world *as we are.*

And if you're *feeling* very differently from someone else then you're also *seeing* very differently as well.

The truth is ...



Let me explain.

If I'm feeling victimized, unloved and lacking in hope, it's highly unlikely that I'll be seeing the world as a great place. Equally, if I'm feeling empowered, loved and positive about my future, the world takes on a new perspective.

The world hasn't changed.

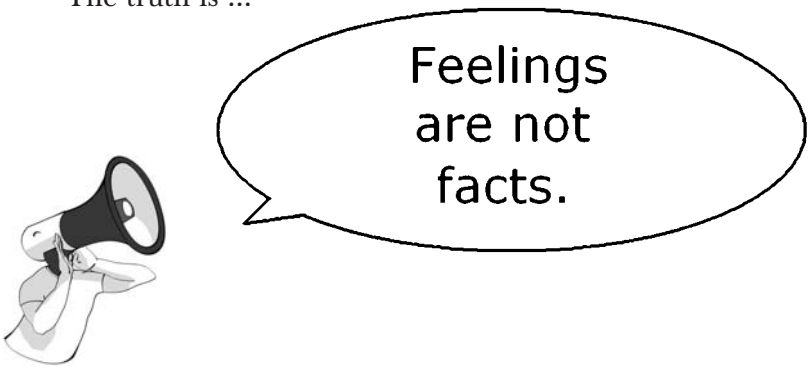
My perspective has.

And my perspective has been influenced by how I'm feeling at that time.

Which is OK, as long as I then don't allow my emotions to hijack my rational perspective and hold me hostage indefinitely.

You see, there's something extremely powerful and important to remember.

The truth is ...



Those four words could be worth far more than a 10 percent change to you. This insight is profound.

It's powerful.

Make sure that you repeat it to yourself regularly, particularly when emotionally you feel that the world is going to end or you can see no possible way out of your situation.

Let me expand further. To feel a particular emotion such as anger, fear or rejection is natural and normal. The key is to remember that these emotions don't by themselves define you or your situation.

And despite what some authors argue, it's not easy to change your emotions in an instant. We're complex beings.

It's not as simple as deciding to click your fingers or switch a button and see your emotions change.

So what can you do?

You can decide while still experiencing your emotions to detach yourself from their power and control over you. I explored some strategies on how to do this in the previous chapter. Here are some more.

Use the following phrases to help you:

- "I'm aware that at the moment I'm experiencing feelings of ..." (You're identifying the emotion and in doing so, you're owning it, rather than it owning you.)
- "I acknowledge why I'm feeling this way (mentally go through the list of reasons as you see them), but I'm aware that my feeling are not facts."
- "I'm conscious that my feelings fluctuate, and will distort my perspective – so now is not the time to make an important decision."
- "Although I feel ... I could do ... to help myself." (You can fill in the blanks.)

To assist you in seeing things differently and gain a clearer perspective on your situation, the following two questions will also help:

- "Where is this issue on a scale of 1–10 (where 10 = death)?"
- "How important will this be in six months' time?"

Remember, the goal is not to eradicate your emotions – that is dangerous and ultimately unachievable. But your

ability to recover your self-esteem and confidence after a setback will be affected by your relationship with your emotions and the power you give to them.

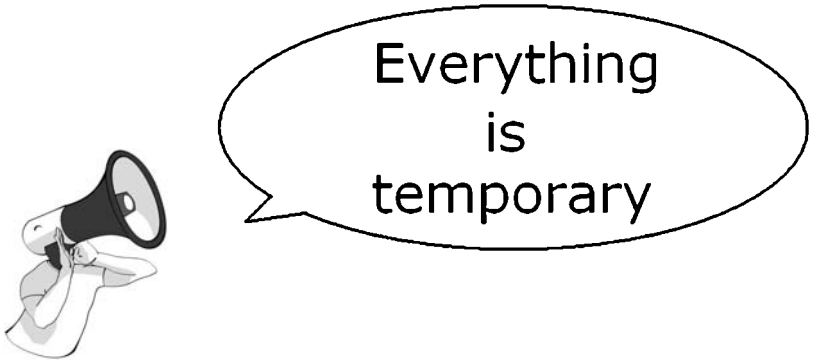
And there's more ...

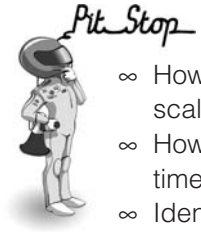
Your perspective on your problem will also be influenced by the following insights I gained from reading the work of Anthony Robbins. They are worth reflecting on and remembering.

- ***Problems are not personal.*** They are not conspiring to get at you personally. It might sometimes feel that way, but it's not. Problems happen to all of us.
- ***Problems are not pervasive.*** Just because you have experienced a setback or disappointment in one area of your life doesn't mean that it will automatically occur in other areas as well. Life does have ups and downs. But remember, in the board game of life there are ladders as well as snakes. The only thing is, when you're feeling down you can fail to notice the ladders. You ignore the positives and believe that everything is going against you. The reality is that it's not. But beware. Problems can and do spread if you resign yourself to the fact they will.
- ***Problems are not permanent.*** They might seem that way at the moment, but things can and do change. How soon they change will depend on you and your response. But if you're locked into the disempowering belief that "there's nothing I can do," then clearly things will take longer to improve. However, if you ask the question "How can I influence or improve the situation?" then

your perspective of the problem changes. At the heart of that question lies an empowering belief that things can change.

No matter how bad the situation looks at the moment, remember, the truth is ...





- How would you rate your current challenges on a scale of 1–10 (where 10 = death)?
- How important will these issues be in six months' time?
- Identify one key challenge you have at the moment. How could you influence or improve the situation? What's the first thing you need to do?
- Which insight about your problem was particularly helpful?

 Problems are not personal.
 Problems are not pervasive.
 Problems are not permanent.

So far I've explored how when the ship hits the flan you can maintain or recover your self-confidence by remembering:

∞ Grieving is good.
∞ It ain't what you see, it's the way that you see it.

Now let's explore the third strategy to help you recover from a setback.

3 Park the pride

Although your setback or challenge may be humbling, that's not to say you'll be humble enough to ask for help. Your sense of pride may prevent you from doing so.

Bad move.

Believing that you can recover from your setback completely unaided is noble, but also nonsense.

There's a phrase that says, "If it's got to be, it's up to me." I agree. But I don't interpret that as "it's up to me *alone*."

You will need to take action.

You will need the inner drive and determination to recover, but it's not necessary to do this without the help of others.

The truth is ...



To call upon the support and strength of others is not an indication of weakness - it's a sign of wisdom.

The Personal Stuff



My friend Steve's divorce was a messy one. Actually, he would describe the breakdown of his marriage as traumatic. It wasn't the arguments about who got the plasma TV or the cat, but the psychological damage that affected him most.

If words have the power of life and death, then Steve felt his ex-wife was a master at dealing out the death cards. It's what had undermined their marriage, and now it was undermining his confidence.

But Steve was brave. Too brave.

"I was respected in my profession, I mentored several guys. People came to me for advice; I was the one who was seen to have all the answers," he says. "So I kept my despair to myself.

"Professionally I remained competent and in control – but personally I felt close to a breakdown. My world was shattered, but I didn't want any help in picking up the pieces."

It was over a year before Steve asked for help, and even longer before he began gradually to see the restoring and rebuilding of his self-esteem and confidence.

"Pride was my biggest problem. I felt asking for help was a sign of weakness. I don't know about whether it's better to give than to receive, but from my experience it's a damn sight easier."

Fortunately Steve's mates were able to help him, but that was only after he parked his pride and admitted he needed some help.

Parking the pride means drawing on the support of others, something we looked at extensively in the chapter "You'll get by with a little help from your friends." The role of the Confidant could be particularly helpful when you've suffered a setback, and make sure you spend time with your Cheerleaders (see Chapter 5).



- How much could you relate to how Steve dealt with his problem?
- In what ways has that approach helped or hindered you?
- How easy do you find asking others for help?
- Who in your world might need your help at the moment?

4 Learn the lessons

It's OK to make mistakes – as long as you don't repeat them. That's good advice.

But as you know already, applying it is not so easy.

Redundancy, divorce or a failed promotion can destabilize you. However, the experience is not just one to recover from, but also one to learn from.

When you fail to look for the lessons from your experience it's hard to find any positives.

And you're more likely to repeat the same mistakes.

It's an easy and common trap to fall into (that's why people keep falling into debt – they don't learn from their mistakes).

Life as you see it may have dealt you a blow.

But it may also have taught you an invaluable lesson.

If you're prepared to look for it.

To help you learn the lessons, here are some great questions to reflect on when you've had a setback in life:

- What has this experience taught me about myself?
- What has it taught me about other people?
- What have I learnt about life from this experience?
- If I were to face a similar event or experience in the future, what would I do differently?
- If I had to give a talk to a group of students about my experience, what would be my top three pieces of advice?



My illness taught me a lot about life, myself and other people. For at least a couple of years I saw it as an episode that would remain firmly locked away in the filing cabinet of life's experiences. It might sound melodramatic, but the whole experience would have been filed away under the letter "d" for devastating. I wasn't keen to reopen it.

However, when I finally felt able to reflect on the episode in more detail, the folder contained more than I'd expected.

I learnt that some people are amazing. My wife headed that particular list.

I learnt that some people with great intentions can have an appalling impact. And be completely blind to the fact.

I learnt that illness doesn't discriminate and whatever I say, do, believe or think, I'm not immune from it.

I learnt that small victories are important. I celebrated when I was able to walk 20 metres without my walking stick, and when I went a whole day without needing a sleep.

I learnt that I'm incredibly impatient. I wanted my recovery to be rapid. I wanted to fast forward through the experience, when actually I needed to press pause.

I learnt that recovery is often gradual and takes time.

I learnt that setbacks are often part of the recovery process.

I learnt that it's OK to have crap days and admit to having them.

I learnt that it's important never to give up and to do all you can to look for the positive.

I learnt that illness is as much of a psychological battle as it is a physical one.

I learnt that I'm more resilient than I realized.

I learnt that my recovery may help other people's recovery.

I guess you could say I learnt a lot – but only when I was prepared and ready to learn the lessons.



- What are you learning from your experience? (Remember life may have dealt you a blow, but it's also taught you an invaluable lesson.) Review the list of questions on page [202] and answer them now.
- Which of those questions is most helpful for you and why?

Here's my fifth and final insight on how to recover your confidence when the ship hits the flan.

5 Molehills matter

When my football team loses, the manager often replies that it's important they bounce back. It's a phrase he uses a lot. Sadly.

The term "bounce back" has a sense of immediacy and urgency about it. When you've had a minor setback it's a helpful goal to have. Asking yourself "What are the three

actions I need to take now in order to bounce back?" is a great question.

However, sometimes an event or experience has such a deep impact on you that the phrase "bouncing back" hardly seems appropriate.

You don't bounce back from a bereavement or a divorce. It's not that easy. The recovery time is longer. Having said that, neither do you want to remain permanently down after a particularly challenging, damaging or difficult experience. Grieving is good – but not indefinitely.

So how do you recover? How do you climb the mountain?

You start with molehills.

Forget the mountain. It's too large and probably looks too difficult to climb.

But molehills?

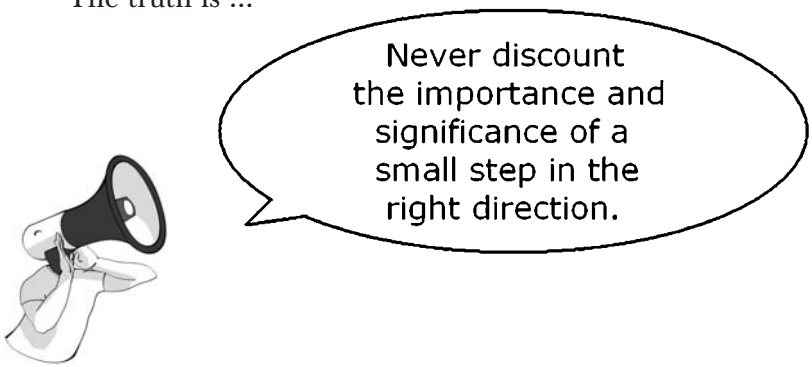
They're small.

They're achievable.

Climb enough molehills and over time you're confident enough to try hill climbing. And when you've had the momentum to climb hills, you've got the belief and inspiration to climb mountains.

But you start with the molehill.

The truth is ...



No matter how small they are, actions add up. A 10 percent change makes a difference. That's the whole premise of this book.

Remember, slowly and sometimes subtly your confidence is growing through the actions you're taking.

Maybe it's just having the courage to leave your house, or to smile at a stranger. Maybe it's returning to work – even though it's only part time.

Maybe its saying "yes" to just one invitation.

It doesn't matter how small. It's a start.

It's creating momentum. The progress may be small, but it's still progress. It's still worth acknowledging and celebrating. It might only be a small victory – but it's still a victory.

And with victory comes hope.

The Personal Stuff



One day I put on my suit. It still fitted me – just. I had spent over two years wearing jeans. There's no need to dress up when you're going to the post office to collect your invalidity benefit. There's no dress code.

But I felt well enough this particular day to drive into town. I perhaps couldn't walk too far, but I wouldn't need my walking stick.

Wearing my suit that day made me feel good. It made me feel normal.

People looking at me would presume I was an office worker on his lunch. They would see my suit.

I didn't wear my suit again for over six months. But it was a start. It gave me a taste of what being well would actually look and feel like in reality. It felt good.

I guess some people could mock such a minor achievement. But it would only be minor to them.

To me it was another step towards my recovery. To me it was another victory. It was a molehill, but it mattered.

Pit Stop



- What's the one simple action, no matter how small, you could take this week to boost your confidence?
- Why take that particular action? What will be the benefit?
- Now imagine how you'd feel once you've done it.

Why don't you email me once you've taken the action, sumo@paulmcgee.com, and let me know how it helped? I promise I'll read your email.



When the ship hits the flan your self-confidence can crumble under the weight of the experience. The damage at first may seem irreparable. But they only write off cars – they don't write off people. Recovery may take time, but it is achievable. The following will definitely help the process:

- Grieving is good – for a time.
- It ain't what you see, it's the way that you see it. Avoid allowing your emotions to hijack and distort the reality of your situation.
- Park the pride – recovery is not a road to travel alone.
- Learn the lessons – life is your greatest teacher, but learning is still optional.
- Molehills matter – small victories add up.

9 Have You Got the Confidence to Go M.A.D.?



You're about to discover

The importance of using your increased confidence to benefit others, not just yourself.

The payoffs you receive when you seek to help others.

How to move out of your comfort zone to make a difference.

We've been on quite a journey. We've explored both how and why confidence can be the catalyst to your success. It's clearly not the only factor that can help you achieve your potential, but it's a hugely important one.

Take self-confidence out of the equation and it affects where you go and what you do. And as we've discovered, a little change in your level of confidence can, over time, make a big difference.

We've also sought to take the "con" out of confidence. There is no magic pill that propels us to a different level. Dancing naked is not the answer (particularly when driving) and self-doubt can never be totally banished. But neither should it master us.

We've learnt that confidence is situational – people are not confident in *everything* they do, unless they're desperately deluded or overwhelmed by their own arrogance. And alcohol may seem like a short-term quick fix, but it's definitely not a long-term cure.

We then went on to play the "explain game" as we examined who crushed your confidence. Our past can haunt us. But confronting and exploring the issues of our personal history can help us to understand our present and then release us to move on more confidently into the future.

As we've seen, people make mistakes – rarely deliberately, often unintentionally. But their words and actions can either infuse us with confidence or gradually erode it.

However, perhaps the biggest culprit in undermining your confidence is looking back at you in the mirror.

You can be your own worst enemy.

The point to remember is that by understanding the causes of our problems, we're better placed to deal with them.

The focus of our journey then changed. The scenery became different as we looked at how to build, or in some cases rebuild, our confidence. The route to recovery requires the support of others. To enjoy emotionally healthy balanced lives, we need people who are our Cheerleaders, Challengers, Coaches and Confidants.

As the terrain changes, so do our requirements as to which type of person or role would be most helpful. Flipflops are great for sandy beaches but less so when climbing a mountain. Equally, Cheerleaders can be fantastic encouragers, but if you're basking in a sea of complacency then you'll find they're not what you require.

We then took time to explore perhaps the single most important relationship in your life: the one with yourself. At times you can be your own worst critic. In many ways this is normal, but over time it can be damaging if you don't take the necessary precautions.

So accept that flaws are us, go easy on the boxing glove and do a spot of DIY plastic surgery on your mind. If such a metaphor seems too extreme, then see working on your mindset as taking medicine for the mind. The important

point to remember is that the conversations we have with ourselves are crucial. So take control of the content.

We've looked at specific situations when you want to shine if your neck's on the line. It's important to understand that increased confidence does not eradicate anxiety or pressure. Neither does it eliminate our feeling of discomfort. The skill comes when we face our challenges and seize our opportunities in spite of how we're feeling.

We learnt a very important lesson – feelings are not facts. And by being better prepared and developing our abilities, confidence can begin to take root and flourish. We've also learnt techniques on how to minimize and master the negative impact of our emotions.

Finally, we explored how even increased confidence still doesn't make you immune from life's challenges. Redundancy, illness, bereavement and divorce can all appear on the horizon and if you don't know how to navigate, the ship can literally hit the flan.

Therefore it's important to recognize that grieving is good – for a time. We need to wallow. But it's not appropriate to stay there. It's part of our journey – it's not our destination.

We also need to recognize that it ain't what you see, it's the way that you see it, and to look for the lessons from our experiences. Collisions do occur, but we can limit the damage – our life doesn't have to be a write-off. And make

sure that you create some momentum by climbing some molehills.

OK. So far so good?

Great.

Now what?

As a result of our journey so far, you may be feeling more confident. You may be able to let go of some baggage that was not only heavy but also unnecessary.

But what about the future?

Is it a case of basking in a lake of self-satisfaction now you're feeling in a better place?

Or is it time to kick on – climb a few more mountains, explore some new landscapes and take a few more people with you for the ride?

Remember the illustration from the first chapter – which day of the week are you on? So what are you going to do with the rest of your journey? Be a player or be a spectator?

The Confidence to Go M.A.D.?

Going M.A.D. is about Making A Difference. Growing in self-confidence will clearly benefit you personally, but wouldn't it be great if it could also benefit others?

I once stayed in a hotel that overlooked Hong Kong harbour. The views were spectacular. The experience was great.

Except for one thing. I had no one to share it with.

Likewise, life is not simply about your journey, but also about how it interplays and influences the journeys of others.

It's now time to explore the connection between confidence and contribution.

Contribution Creates Confidence

As you already know, anxiety occurs when you become overly concerned and sensitive about how you come across to other people. It's possible to obsess about people's opinions of you and to see life as a play where you always have to be centre stage. This constant inward focus becomes unhealthy – and your emotional development is stunted.

Of course, you play the lead role in the drama of your life but even the star of the show spends some time in the wings.

You see, when you turn the spotlight onto others and look to help them, you also develop in the process.

The truth is ...



In helping others we help ourselves

Let's explore in more detail how contribution creates confidence.



Let me tell you about Beth. She's the daughter of one of my best friends. And to me she's an inspiration.

It all started when she watched a video about the work of Operation Christmas Child (www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk). The charity wants Christmas to be a special and exciting time for every child throughout the world, and not just for those who can afford it. In a nutshell, Operation Christmas Child helps ordinary people to make a simple but extraordinary difference to children's lives.

How? The idea is a simple one. Get a shoe box and fill it with some small gifts that are appropriate for either a boy

or a girl. There are stipulations on what can and can't be included, but it won't cost much to fill a shoe box.

It's a great idea for many reasons. First, in our household it means we're doing something constructive with all the empty shoe boxes that my teenage daughter Ruth acquires throughout the year.

Secondly, and most importantly, it means that some children wake up at least one day of the year with something very exciting to look forward to. A tangible expression of love, if you like.

Operation Christmas Child provides the ideas, guidance and organisational know-how to make this happen. But that's not enough. The charity also needs people: people to galvanize and inspire others to find and fill those shoe boxes.

And that's where Beth comes in. Beth told her teachers at school about the shoe box campaign. And what did her teachers do?

Told Beth to get on and do it.

They would support her, but as it was her idea she also needed to be the figurehead. They reasoned that a pupil encouraging other pupils to take action was likely to meet with more success than a teacher trying to achieve the same outcome.

Beth was 10 years old at the time. Her primary school mates bought into the idea and the project was a great success.

But it didn't stop there. Beth was so inspired by the simplicity of the idea and the effect it had on children that

she wanted to continue the project. She was then 11 and inspired her secondary school to embrace the idea.

"I started small initially," she says. "Just putting up posters around the school and leaflets in class registers. I did a five-minute talk to a year assembly. I was terrified, but Dad gave me some help in what to say."

And the idea grew. As did Beth's confidence.

"My biggest challenge was when I was asked to take the whole school assembly. We showed a video and I talked more about the project."

There were over 900 kids in assembly.

"When I first started doing the assemblies I wrote down everything I wanted to say, but having given a few talks I got to the point whereby I just spoke from the heart."

A 10-year-old Beth never envisaged that her idea would one day see her taking an assembly at secondary school. She simply took the first step. She didn't start with the confidence to do such a thing – the confidence developed as she took the first step.

Maybe that's the key. Don't look at the size of the mountain. Simply focus on the next part of your journey. Start climbing molehills.



3 I went to Tanzania with an organiza-
alled Act4Africa. It is a charity that
ı education and drama helps people in
ınderstand and fight against the spread
AIDS (www.act4africa.org.uk).

The founders of the charity are Martin and Kathy Smedley. Martin's a part-time actor and engineer and Kathy's a teacher. They have teenage kids and a mortgage and seem just like any normal couple.

In fact they are. Except for one thing. They have an overwhelming desire to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

That's a tall order.

For an ordinary couple. But they had a belief in themselves that together they could make a difference.

Martin says, "The need is so great we felt we just had to do something – no matter how small. Kathy and I make a good team – our skills complement each other."

Did they possess unshakeable confidence and belief in themselves that they could do something?

"Absolutely not," replied Martin. "We often feel so out of our depth. But if we'd waited until we felt totally confident in our abilities, we'd still be waiting. The crucial thing is just deciding to do something – to take action. Don't let the scale of the problem or your own self-doubt distract you."

Martin and Kathy moved out of their comfortable and safe world in a suburb of Manchester into a world of bureaucracy, red tape and unchartered territory in Africa. They started with no money and no staff, but a belief that together they could do something.

It's been quite a journey. They once found themselves in the Prime Minister's office in Tanzania and have discovered skills they never thought they had: marketing, PR,

fund raising and now being seen by others as health experts in the area of HIV/AIDS.

They battle constantly with a need for finances to fund their work, and sometimes wonder if they're really making a difference to such a huge problem.

The facts would suggest they are. So far one million people in Africa have been educated through the Act4Africa programme working in schools, churches and with local community leaders. Their creative approach to tackling the problem is beginning to make a difference.

They have 20 staff – the majority Africans, working long term with their communities. Over 200 people have so far worked with the charity on a short-term basis lasting anywhere from two weeks to a year.

This is not rhetoric. It's reality.

Martin and Kathy's goal was never about how they personally could gain from the experience. It wasn't a strategy to raise their self-esteem and boost their self-confidence.

They simply saw a need and decided to do something about it.

But there have been some additional payoffs to what they have started.

"It's made me realize just how much people are capable of," said Martin. "I'd never have dreamt I could do all the things we've done. Both of us have moved way way out of our comfort zone – and yet we're still standing. I guess our confidence and belief have grown through this whole experience."

So too have the people working with them on a short-term basis. Martin elaborated, "I think it's fair to say we've had some interesting characters join up – and I'm not just

thinking of you, Paul! We've had a couple of people with deep psychological problems who'd heard of our work. We took a risk with them. But it's not like we were giving them a full-time job. They've had to raise their own funds to come out and join us on a short-term basis. And they have.

"What's more, the work has provided these people with an outward focus. Rather than always looking inward at their own issues, they've been confronted with other people's problems. We've put some trust in [these] people, given them responsibility, and it's paid off."

One girl who'd been on the team recently qualified as a nurse. She had all sorts of issues when she went out to Tanzania with Martin, and was unemployed at the time. "I guess Act4Africa played some part in her recovery," commented Martin.

What triggered this amazing work?

Desire was definitely at the top of the list. Martin and Kathy felt almost a calling to do something.

But did confidence play a part?

Absolutely.

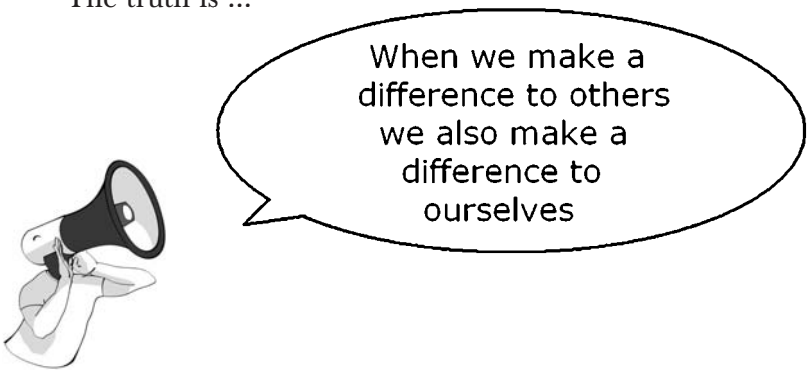
Without some degree of self-belief nothing would ever have happened.

They knew they had some abilities. They knew they were a good team together. And they knew that the biggest obstacle to overcome was simply to start the work.

Martin and Kathy are remarkable people who continue to face many challenging situations. They've opted out of the kingdom of comfort and decided to make a difference.

And that's exactly what they've done. Not just to a million people in Africa. Not just to 200 people in the UK. But also to themselves.

The truth is ...



Over to you

So you've heard Beth's, Martin's and Kathy's story, and how they're seeking to make a difference.

The question is, what's your story going to be?

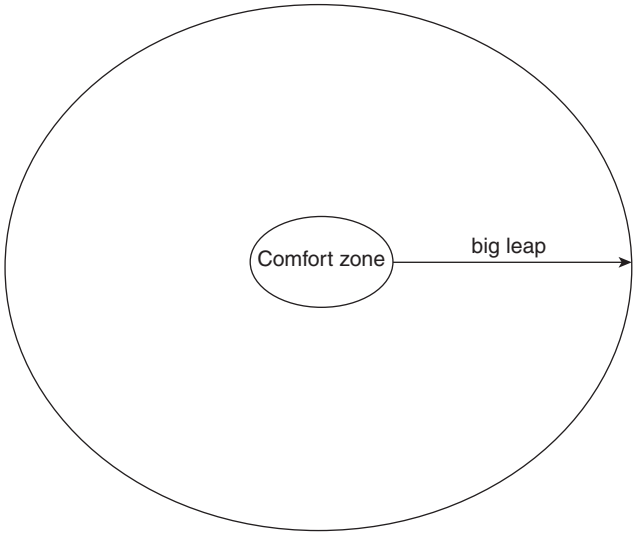
I'm not suggesting that you start a charity or move to Africa, but I am suggesting that you take some action. Do something where you're not the focus, but someone or something else is.

The goal is not to broadcast how wonderful you are, but simply to offer your services or implement an idea that will help others.

If you Google "volunteering" you will discover countless websites that can inspire you with ideas on how you can

make a difference. The chances are that when you do this you'll be doing something that takes you out of your comfort zone.

The picture could look like this:

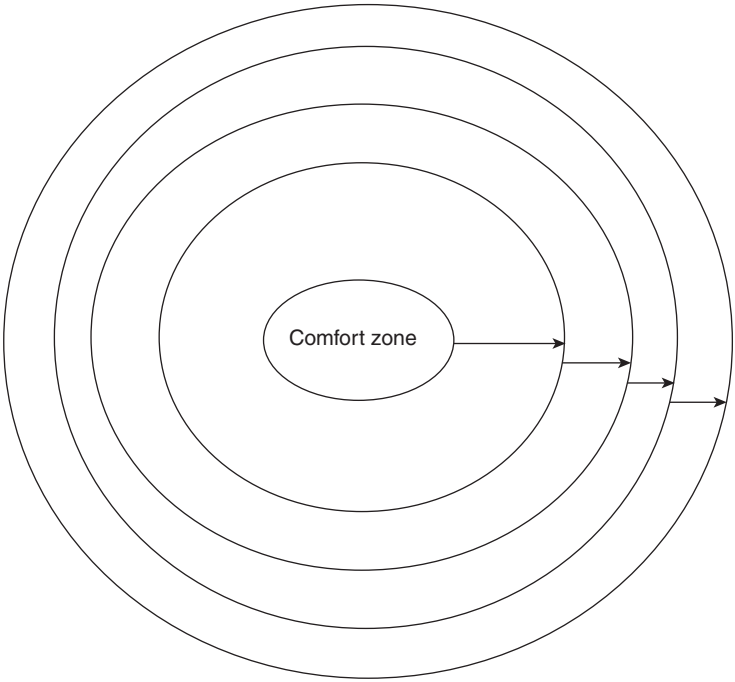


It's a big stretch. You're way out of your comfort zone. For Beth that would have meant starting secondary school and within a matter of weeks taking the whole school assembly.

For Martin and Kathy that would have meant starting a charity and then visiting the Prime Minister's office in Tanzania within a few weeks.

But that didn't happen straight away. It might for some people; but not for Beth, Kathy and Martin.

Moving out of their comfort zone looked more like this:



Notice that the first step they took was still the biggest. It's usually the hardest one to take. What follows can often be a series of small steps taken over time.

Each step sees the expanding of their comfort zone. It's not a dramatic leap – that's often not required. But like

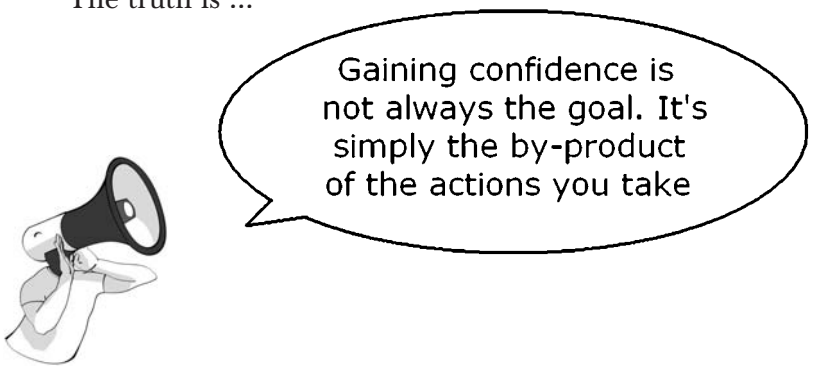
building a wall, confidence can take time. It's built gradually, one brick at a time.

But as Beth said, "Actually it's amazing looking back how far I've come. You don't realize it until you take a look back."

You see small actions over time can bring about big results.

A 10 percent change can make a big difference.

The truth is ...



And remember, taking action is rarely done in isolation. Martin and Kathy had each other; Beth found support from her mum and dad and a couple of teachers. Evidence again that you do get by with a little help from your friends.

A Dreamer or a Doer?

Anyone can dream. Lots of people do.

Anyone can have ideas. The world is full of people with ideas.

But the value of dreams and ideas is when you turn them into actions. It's when you take the first step.

I knew I wanted to take my principles developed in my *SUMO* (*Shut Up, Move On*) book into education. My first step?

Mention it in my SUMO book.

That's all.

I had no idea how long it would take to materialize, or even what the product would look like, but I knew I needed people to help turn the dream into a reality. I was overwhelmed with enthusiastic people contacting me, but ultimately I needed enthusiasts who could also be implementers.

It took me two years to find them. And it's been hard work. But in 2009 we launched SUMO4Schools in the UK. Ultimately the goal is to take the concept into other countries as we seek to provide young people with the skills, insights and confidence to make their own difference in life.

Martin Luther King had a dream – but he also had a strategy. He had people alongside him who worked tirelessly to make the dream a reality.

Dreams are the sexy stuff. They're what inspire people. But it's the non-sexy stuff – the phone calls, the planning, the travelling, the printing, the organizing that makes the dreams come true.

Barack Obama's Presidential campaign slogan was "Yes We Can." Interestingly, in a land that worships individualism, he didn't choose "Yes You Can." Working together, collectively, for the benefit of others is what his vision is about.

That's a lesson for us all.



- What part of Beth's and Kathy and Martin's stories inspired you most?
- Write down a way in which you make a difference.
- If you were to "start small" what would your goal be?
- Who would be the "friends" you need to help you?
- What's the first action you need to take?

Let me know what you decide to do – contact me at sumo@paulmcgee.com.

May you have the confidence to go and make a difference.

And if you feel nervous, anxious or even terrified at the prospect, may you have the courage to take the first step. Feel the fear and go for it anyway.

And here's the remarkable truth. I promise you that a small change, over time, can and will make a difference – not just to you, but to others as well.

I hope that reading this book provides you with some of the tools, encouragement and, perhaps most importantly, the confidence to do so.

Let me know how you get on.

I wish you success.

Go M.A.D.

Paul – The Sumo Guy

More Stuff That Will Help

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Time for Some Gratitude

If there's one lesson I learnt in life it's this: success comes from the support of others. I'm a living example of how true that is.

So it's time to publicly acknowledge some of the supporters who've helped contribute to my journey so far and who've given me the confidence to pursue some of my dreams.

J. John, you're amazing. You personify for me the gift of encouragement. Your integrity, faithfulness and desire to do all you can to help others succeed and find meaning in life, is an example to us all.

Andy Bounds and Richard Farrow have both taken time to give their invaluable insights as to how to improve this book. I'm truly grateful for your wisdom and fresh perspective. Thanks guys.

As for Mr. Sandham, well it still concerns me that you know more about Russian literature than you do football, but I still love you (in the brotherly sense). Thanks for being such a key player in my life and for so graciously pointing out my many blind spots. I've grown in confidence because of you.

To Gill, Vicky, Ian and Richard, thanks for catching the vision to take SUMO to young people. It's not been an easy journey at times but because of you I'm confident of its ability to help impact young people's lives. Let's keep pressing on.

To my friends at Eagles in Singapore, well you've become a second family to me. Thank you for the faith you've shown in me and for the fun we've had together. Your hospitality and generosity has both humbled my heart and widened my waistline.

As for my professional speaking buddies, well your support, wisdom and advice has been priceless. Special thanks go to Dave Thomas, Brendan Power, Will Kintish, Roy Sheppard, Phil Hesketh, Steve McDermott, Curly Uppington, Clive Gott, John Hotowka, Damian Hughes, Shay McConnon, Molly Harvey, Frank Furness, Amanda Clarke, Val McKie, Marie Mosley, Lesley Everett, Nigel Risner, Robin Sieger, Steve Head, Paul Bridle and Graham Davies. Keep making a difference guys.

Mark and Anita, you've become very special friends in such a short period of time. You've been my cheerleaders and your generosity, humour and passion for life is infectious. It's a privilege knowing you both.

To Commander Ken and gorgeous Gail I thank you again for laughter, good wine, long walks (!) and your willingness to listen to my stories. How gracious you are.

As for Richard and Fiona, you simply excel in encouragement. You've built me up so much over the years and your willingness to help others is inspiring. Thank you.

Special thanks also to my editor Holly Bennion – those long conversations have been worth it. And to Kev Daniels who worked tirelessly typing up this manuscript and deciphering my scrawl – you deserve a medal.

As for Graham Britton – I've rarely come across anyone who is as professional and reliable as you. Thanks for all your dedication and hard work mate.

To my brother Andy I have only one question. How come you got the good looks, height and super-efficient metabolic rate? Still love you though and appreciate your wealth of wisdom that you're so willing to share. Still struggle that you support Manchester City though.

Mum and Dad, I'm so grateful that on a cold winter's night back in '63 you decided to switch off the TV and have an early night. Hopefully what happened nine months later made it worthwhile! Mum keep being a glamorous Nan and Dad keep telling your stories (but get a new hearing aid – please!).

Margaret, you're not just a great ironer, decorator and cat sitter – you're a pretty good mother-in-law as well. Thanks for bearing with my humour.

And finally to Helen, Matt and Ruth. What can I say? I'm proud to be your husband and Father. You make my life

complete guys and I'll be eternally grateful for having you around – particularly when I need to erect some flat packed furniture or learn how to operate some new technical gadget. (Admit it though – I did pretty well learning how to use the new toaster.)

With gratitude

Paul McGee

Bring Paul McGee to Your Organisation

Paul McGee speaks around the world at team events, conferences, workshops and retreats. From a one hour keynote presentation, to a three day seminar, Paul tailors his material to your specific requirements, primarily in the areas of:

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- Confidence
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